

jeervadhara

WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES IN THEOLOGY

Edited by
Sebastian Painadath

PROCESSED

DEC 15 1997

GTU LIBRARY

ISSN 0970 - 1125

Vol. XXVII No. 159

JEEVADHARA

is published every month
alternately in English and Malayalam

GENERAL EDITOR
Joseph Constantine Manalel

SECTION EDITORS

The Human Problem

Felix Wilfred

C. Thomas Abraham

The Word of God

Augustine Mulloor

Mathew Variamattom

The Living Christ

Sebastian Painadath

Jose Panthackal

The People of God

Kuncheria Pathil

George Karakunnel

The Meeting of Religions

John B. Chethimattam

Thomas Manninezhath

The Fulness of Life

Thomas Srampickal

Mathew Paikada

Manager: Jose Pollayil

SECTIONAL BOARD OF EDITORS

Cyril Mar Baselios

Thomas Mampra

Bosco Puthur

Christopher Duraisingh

Cyprian Illickamury

EDITOR - BOOK REVIEW

J. B. Chethimattam

jeevadhara

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES IN THEOLOGY

Edited by
Sebastian Painadath

Jeevadhara
Kottayam - 686 041
Kerala, India
Tel. (91) (481) 597430

CONTENTS

Editorial	159
A Christological Reflection on Women's Movements in the World	161
<i>Aruna Gnanadason</i>	
Jesus - the Embodiment of God's Compassion	173
<i>Elke Hoffmann</i>	
Paul And Women: A Critical Reflection	188
<i>Pauline C.</i>	
The Father of Jesus is mother	204
<i>A Meditation on the Symbols of the Gospel according to John.</i>	
<i>Sebastian Painadath</i>	
The Excommunication of Tissa Balasuriya: A Warning to Asian Theologians?	212
<i>Georg Evers</i>	
Bulletin:	231
Statement of the First European Women's Synod	

EDITORIAL

Women are waking up all over the world, in the Church and in civil society. They assert their rights and demand their recognition. They commit themselves to the issues of social justice, peace and eco-harmony. With an innate feeling of compassion they get involved in the cause of the poor and the marginalised. Women evolve today as power in society.

Church cannot ignore this 'sign of the times'. The divine Spirit is moving creatively in the initiatives and movements of women all over the world. It is an epochal need to discover this power and presence of the Spirit and promote it. New theological perspectives are evolving out of these movements. Such perspectives raise radical challenges on the assumptions of the traditional theology, which has been shaped by men and protected by male structures of religion.

Women's initiatives and movements call for a courageous and honest 'return to the sources' of christian faith experience. This issue of *Jeevadhara* is a modest attempt to respond to this challenge. The authors of the articles reflect on the aspects of the contemporary awakening of women all over the world and explore the deeper meaning of the experience of the Divine in Christ.

Sebastian Painadath offers a meditation on Jesus' experience of the motherly Father; he shows how the Johannine symbols reveal the mother-dimension of Jesus' experience. Pauline Chakkalakal analyses some of the 'anti-women texts' of Paul; she argues for a distinction between Paul's concern for the integrity of the new community and the culturally conditioned praxis of early christianity. Aruna Gnanadasan reflects on some of the women's movements in the world; she demands that we need a new christology, not the one that legitimises male domination but a christology that inspires women to work towards their legitimate liberation. Elke Hoffmann explores the deeper christological sig-

nificance of womens' movements in India; she describes the struggles of Indian women to understand the mystery of Christ in new paradigms.

A threefold (trinitarian) consequence emerges out of these christological reflections on the experience of women: (i) the Christian understanding of God needs a mystical anchoring in the primal experience of Jesus: God the Father is Motherly Father and Fatherly Mother. (ii) Church has to evolve as a spiritual community in which there is ultimately 'no distinction between male and female': in the Son we are all one, like branches of a tree, like members of a body. (iii) the liberation movements and initiatives of women are to be discerned as movements of the divine Spirit: the Spirit recreates everything into the new being manifest in the Risen Christ.

When on the one hand God is understood exclusively in male imageries it is a demanding God; as a result structures controlled by men dominate life and thought in the church. When on the other hand God is conceived in feminine categories the compassionate face of the Divine emerges in human consciousness; consequently Church evolves as a community of compassionate hearts.

A concrete event that needs attention in this regard is the case of the Sri Lankan theologian Tissa Balasurya. In his article *Mary and Human Liberation* Balasurya raises important questions on some of the assumptions of the traditional European theology; these are in fact points for intercultural discussion in the worldwide community of believers in Christ. But unfortunately the Roman authorities declared him excommunicated from the church! The theological issues brought forth by this Asian theologian have their sharpness because they have been raised from womens' perspectives. Georg Evers offers a penetrating analysis of the hidden motives of the Roman authorities in handling this issue.

It is our hope that these theological perspectives would help the christian community to look at basic theological issues anew in the context of the forthcoming Asian Synod.

Sebastian Painadath

A CHRISTOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN THE WORLD

Aruna Gnanadasan, who is very much in touch with women's movements in all the five continents, offers pertinent christological reflections from the basis, from the midst of suffering, struggling and questioning women. The crucified Christ as the embodiment of God's compassionate love manifests the God who is being born in a woman's psyche, a solace to her in her struggles and assurance of freedom from submission to false authorities of the male. However the christology of a patriarchal church projects the image of a male God descending from above and legitimising the sufferings of women as propitiation for sins. Such a christology condemns women to bondage to the male dominated structures of life and thought in the church. Aruna argues for a new look at Jesus in view of strengthening and liberating women. Aruna Gnanadasan is in charge of Women's Programme, Justice Peace Creation Unit, WCC in Geneva.

"Jesus where can we find you in our world today,
Jesus where can we find you, incarnate word today
Look at your brother beside you, look at your sister beside you,
Look...listen....care."

So sang the woman song writer from the Caribbean, Doreen Potter, some ten years ago, before she died. Where is Jesus? Is he not present in the helpless tears of a mother who watches her child die of poverty inflicted malnutrition? Is he not present in the pain of a girl child prostitute who at 13 already spends her life responding to the cruel demands of men on her body? Is not Jesus present in the torn flesh of a girl child who has been raped because she is the child of a Dalit militant? Tell me, is he not present in the wounded psyche of a woman who has been battered both physically and mentally in her home...first as a daughter, then as a wife and then as a mother? Is not Jesus present in the disturbed heart of a woman who has been abused by her priest in the safe

womb of the sacristy where she had turned for support and pastoral care? Where do women find Jesus?

Women have found comfort of the suffering servant in their suffering. They have sung songs of praise to Jesus often their sole refuge and strength. "*Kaapaar unnai Kaapaar, Kaathavar kaapaar innum innimel, kaathiduvaar. Kalangādei manamei, kaathiduvār*" (The one who protected you will continue to protect you. Do not be restless, my soul, he will protect you.) This Tamil lyric was often heard in my childhood home. There are many songs women sing to the Jesus who comforts them: "Jesus loves me, this I know"; "Jesus, my friend"; "Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of the nations".

The need for a spiritual source of power and strength in the midst of powerlessness and survival has been at the heart of women's efforts to struggle for justice and violence their free lives. Christ is God's presence in the daily life of women living in a context of struggle. Christ is - friend and confidant. He knows what it is to be female in the context of exclusion and violence. Jesus' relationship to the oppressed - his compassion for women is what has often sustained women in their suffering. Their child-like faith and often simple faith in the Christ who weeps with them is what keeps them living. Christ is seen as healer and provider. Women live in the assurance that Christ cares and will provide.

To women, the presence of Jesus Christ means that God is real

Christ brings God down to earth. Recently in Nairobi, Kenya in a consultation on the Theology of Life organised by the World Council of Churches, street children performed a drama depicting the story of their lives. A little girl who is on the street tells her story. Her father had thrown her and her mother out of the house when he wished to take in a new woman. Her mother dies on the street and she is befriended by a group of street children with whom she has to live that daily struggle for survival. She concludes her story with this powerful theological message - "God loved his son, but my father did not love me." It was indeed an innocent reflection on the image of God as revealed in the life of Christ. Even more potent was the reflection by a woman theologian from Brazil, who shared the reflection of a prostitute. When asked if she believed that she was made in the image of God, the prostitute replied:

Do I feel myself like God's image? Am I made in the image of God? Are you crazy? How can you ask me such a thing? How can a prostitute be like God? Do you mean by your question: am I like a

portrait of God? As if God, looking at me, could see himself? No, you are crazy! Don't even think about it. Its a sin even to think about such a thing!

I want God as something beautiful, clean, pure and very strong; to help me and to help others. I don't want God to be like me. I don't want to be an image of God. Imagine. If that was so, no one would believe in God anymore. And the world would be crazy. The night wouldn't follow the day and the stars wouldn't lie together with the moon.

May be, looking into my heart, people can find good things. It's the place where I keep pureness, beauty, dreams and, very deep in my heart, maybe I can find a little piece of God.

But there is another thing I remember. God is powerful. No-body gives orders to God. And I think that, in this case, I am a little like God; nobody gives me orders. That's a joke, so don't worry.

When I got pregnant I didn't know if I should have the baby. Everybody gave me advice; there were many opinions. But I had the baby. It was a boy. The birth of my son was such a marvellous sensation. And I asked myself: doesn't God make us too? Aren't we God's sons and daughters?

I don't know if God loves us as much as I love my son.

And I have also learned that God can forgive us everything. Everything can be forgiven. My son does not know I am a prostitute. I think he would not accept it. But a mother accepts everything from her son. Do you think God is like a mother? That God really does forgive everything the sons and daughters do wrong?

I really believe in God. But I really don't know if God is in me, maybe a little bit.

The Church says that everybody is God's sons and daughters. But why, when I go to church, am I ashamed? I look everywhere to see if someone can imagine I am a prostitute. Why do I go into church with my head down? If God knows me why am I ashamed when it's his house?

But I talk to God. And I ask him to help me; to be happy. I just need a few things, a little house, a little garden and to love my son.

It is such spiritual energy and simple faith in God revealed in the love of God's Son that sustains women in their striving for dignity and humanity.

The church: it's theology, its solidarity!

The church does not give women that dignity. Interpretations of sin and evil have always tended to focus on women and their sexuality. As the prostitute so vividly describes it, the church makes women like her ashamed of their sexuality, rather than provide them a safe space to be felt welcomed so as to discover God within themselves. To explore the role the church plays in the lives of women, I take just one example and describe it in some detail. I speak of the issue of violence against women, because the World Council of Churches has identified this issue as central in its work with women in recent times.

What seems missing is the moral authority of the church to speak out boldly on issues such as violence against women. Women have claimed that the church has a moral responsibility to stand in solidarity with them in their pain - they say that the issue of violence against them has both ethical and ecclesial importance. The active voices of women are often drowned by the more loud voices of the patriarchal church. In the context of the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women, a ten year programme of the World Council of Churches which had been offered to the churches in 1988, WCC organised a series of ecumenical Decade Team Visits to the member churches. These teams, composed of 2 men and 2 women were seen "living letters" to the churches to reflect with them on how far they have come in their commitments made to women at the launching of the Decade. All the Teams have challenged the churches to reflect on the way they deal with the issue of violence against women. Most Teams report on the total insensitivity of many church leaders to this concern. I share some comments heard to indicate just how much has to be done: this from the leader of a church, where the women shared that there is battering even in homes of clergy: "Every time I beat my wife she should thank me, because she is one step closer to salvation." This comment from another church leader, "We are really unable to act on it, because clergymen are themselves violent"...or more often, "This is something the church cannot deal with - it is part of our culture." This from another church leader, "It is all an illusion, women of 'my' church are strong enough to handle violence"...and this comment from many more... "It does not happen in 'my' church, 'our' country, no

woman has come to me to complain"...or this, "Give me the theological reasons why there must be no violence against women".

These are the more articulate voices - the ones who brazenly speak out. But more often, there is a resounding silence - a refusal to see the intensity of the violence, an attempt to underplay its significance in the life of the churches and in our societies. Some churches, are of course dealing with it now.....but they too are just able to touch the tip of the iceberg.

What makes it so difficult to deal with is the fact that it is a theological problem and that the exclusion of women and the sometimes silencing of their voices are so often legitimised by religious practices and teachings - including that of the church. The silence is rooted in these theological convictions and teachings: the doctrine of forgiveness; the doctrine of the Cross as the only symbol of redemption; the myths and the mysteries surrounding the human body and human sexuality; the identification of sin and temptation with femaleness; the exclusively male image of God; the mind/body dualism that devalues female life; the depreciation of creation....these are some of the problems Christianity poses, giving subtle sanction to the exclusion that women experience.

In a regional meeting, in Latin America, the women wrote:

We believe that, as a consequence of the tolerance of these situations, the body of Christ is mutilated. This part that is affected suffers and is marginalised from the possibility of full participation in the community. On tolerating these injustices, the church loses its moral authority and falls into the trap of a double-standard morality. The hope for rebuilding and renewal in Christ is destroyed.¹

The Cross: A symbol of hope?

The Cross which has been the central theological symbol of the church and of the Christian faith has in recent years been reappropriated and discovered anew by women theologians. To liberation theologians the Cross has been the strongest symbol of Christ's identification as co-

1. From the San Jose Declaration, San Jose, Costa Rica; the statement made at the Latin American Regional Consultation on Violence Against Women held in the context of the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women, organised jointly by the Council of Churches in Latin America (CLAI) and the World Council of Churches in Geneva

sufferer with the oppressed. A call for the reconstruction of this basic theological symbol is rooted in the theology of sacrifice and suffering that the church so easily invites women to. A sacrificial life-style and a commitment to die for the other are indeed Christ-like qualities that women would emulate, if it would lead to the liberation of their families and communities. It is a well known reality that women would give up everything, their own dreams and aspirations for the sake of their families, particularly for their children - often this is a voluntary act, a conscious decision that some women make. However, it is equally true that women have for centuries borne pain and hurt silently, many times standing on the threshold of a violent death in the hands of the men they live with. Or it could be the experience of marginalisation and even exclusion that women are expected to live with because of the strict mores and values of a patriarchal world order. They remain silent because they are taught by the church that, "Christ died for you on the Cross, can you not bear some suffering too?"

Women ask whether the sacrifice demanded of them has a purpose. As an EATWOT related gathering of Indian women put it:

Christ died on the Cross, because humankind could not bear his disturbing and uncomfortable message of salvation for the world. By his death, he saved the world from its hypocrisy, apathy and selfishness. He was the scapegoat for a wicked and cruel world. Christ gave his life for a purpose.

The theology of sacrifice that is thrust on women is of no purpose....Women are the scapegoats of this theology. What they have to discover for themselves is the resurrection element in their sacrifice, as a step towards the discovery of their power.²

For Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Ghanaian woman theologian and President of the EATWOT, sacrifice is that which is "freely and consciously made" and is "noble and lovely, loving and motivated by love and gratitude". The exclusion and violence that women experience is none of these. "The Christ for me," she says "is the Jesus of Nazareth who agreed to be God's 'sacrificial lamb' thus teaching that true and living sacrifice is *that which is freely and consciously made*....who approved of the costly sacrifice of the woman with the expensive oil who anointed him in

2. "The National Situation: A Biblical Response from Women", in *Stree Reflect Series*, No.1, All India Council of Christian Women/National Council of Churches in India, 1986.

preparation of his burial, thereby approving all that is noble and lovely, loving and motivated by love and gratitude.³

Two US Methodist women ministers who are engaged in a programme of care for women victims of violence take a more radical approach. Influenced by the broken lives of the women to whom they offer pastoral care, they write:

Christianity is an abusive theology that glorifies suffering. Is it any wonder that there is so much abuse in modern culture when the predominant image or theology of the culture is of "divine child abuse"- God the Father demanding and carrying out the suffering and death of his own son? If Christianity is to be liberating for the oppressed, it must itself be liberated from its theology.⁴

Black womanist theologian Delores S. Williams, takes a similar position:

My exploration of black women's sources has revealed a heretofore undetected structure of domination...operative in African-American women's lives since slavery. The structure...is surrogacy, and it gives black women's oppression its unique character, and raises challenging questions about the way redemption is imaged in the Christian context.

God's gift to humans, through Jesus, was to invite them to participate in this ministerial vision ("whoever will let them come") of righting relations. The response to this invitation by human principalities and powers was the horrible deed this cross represents - the evil of humankind trying to kill the ministerial vision of life...Thus, to respond meaningfully to black women's historic experience of surrogacy-oppression, the theologian must show that redemption of humans can have nothing to do with any kind of surrogate role Jesus was reputed to have played in the bloody act that supposedly gained victory over sin/or evil.⁵

-
3. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "An African Woman's Christ", *Voices from the Third World*, Vol.XI, No.2, EATWOT, December 1989.
 4. Joanne Carison Brown and Rebecca Parker, *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, Pilgrim Press, New York, 1989.
 5. Delores Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption", in *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of World Religions*, Orbis books, New York, 1992.

For women living in violent and unsafe contexts in home or community, who have clung to the image of a loving and compassionate God and of God's Son who so loved the world that he was willing to die for it, such a theological position is difficult to accept. But living in what Roman Catholic feminist theologian Mary Hunt calls "a world of contextual violence and episodic justice", we must try to understand what these women theologians are inviting us to discover. And this does involve looking at violence and Christology in a new way.

Mary Hunt in fact suggests that, "those texts, doctrines and practices that perpetuate what today is considered violence, regardless of their historical centrality in the tradition be dropped." She is aware that she is calling for fundamental change in Christianity when she suggests that "we begin with the basics like the violent death of Jesus, and look fearlessly for alternative ways of articulating meaning and value. Only by doing so", Mary Hunt concludes, "will we be able to say that there is no cause and effect between Christianity and a violent culture, and perhaps in the process we will undo some of the violence".⁶

What is evident is that senseless suffering can never be legitimized by the cruel death that Christ suffered on the Cross. Marie Fortune, who has for long worked on the issue of clergy sexual abuse in pastoral situations reminds us that, "rather than the sanctification of suffering, Jesus' crucifixion remains a witness to the horror of violence. It is not a model of how suffering should be borne, but a witness of God's desire that no one should have to suffer that violence again".⁷ But to Mercy Oduyoye the problem lies in the "collusion of the church" in the various forms of oppression of women. To her "Christian discipleship is crucial" in dealing with these issues. She writes:

If unmerited suffering is redemptive, then in a community of women and men travelling with the suffering Christ, all need to share that suffering. Do the Beatitudes apply to men? Christian women should challenge the theology, Christology and anthropology that do violence to women's humanity.⁸

6. Mary Hunt, "Waging War at Home: Christianity and Structural Violence" in *Miriam's Song V. Priests for Equality*, 1992.

7. Marie Fortune, *Family Violence a Workshop Manual*, Centre for the Prevention of Sexual and domestic Violence, Seattle, USA, 1980

8. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Violence Against Women: Window on Africa in *Voices from the Third World*, EATWOT, Vol. VIII No. 1, June 1995, p. 175

Ethic of survival and resistance

Her words reflect a mood among women globally. We are in a new phase of the women's movement. Women no longer see themselves as victims of violence and oppression. They see themselves as survivors, as those who will remain silent no longer. In their struggles for life, but also in their resistance to the forces of violence and death, women have found Jesus Christ as a liberator -Christ working through, for and with women. It is in the attempt to move beyond a feeling of hopelessness, to move beyond their victimisation that women have turned to Jesus as their liberator.

In this women have understood what it means for Jesus to be Christ. Jesus is revealed in who Christ is and through what Christ does in the life of the community. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, in her path breaking book, *In Memory of Her*, explores the image of Jesus as Sophia's prophet, proclaiming a vision of the prophet, proclaiming a vision of the *basiliea* (kingdom/reign) of God that engendered a discipleship of equals; the community's praxis of inclusive wholeness had subverted patriarchal relations of domination in empire and household. Despite the subsequent repatriarchalization of Christianity she sees Jesus and the movement gathered around him as a possible prototype for women struggling for liberation today.

In the Asian context, the most important reflections on Christology in the context of women in struggle have come from the Korean feminist theologian Chung Hyun Kyung. In her doctoral thesis she has a whole section on "Who is Jesus for Asian Women?". Here she explores how Asian women have reinterpreted traditional images of Jesus in their lives as well as exploring new and emerging images. For example, while acknowledging that Asian women have often identified their suffering with that of the Suffering Servant, who has been their only source of hope. Hyun Kyung challenges the legitimisation of the suffering of women with this teaching and particularly the teaching that "without the cross, there will be no resurrection". Along with other Asian women, she asks these open questions:

This is a hard and confusing teaching for Asian women. They are asking, "Why should we die in order to gain Jesus' love? Can't we

love Jesus while being fully alive?" For Asian women self-denial and love are always applied to women in the church as they are in the family. But why isn't this teaching applied to men?⁹

Drawing on the responses of Asian feminist theologians to such questions, she writes:

Servanthood is not mere submission or obedience. It is instead a powerful witness to evil and a challenge to the powers and principalities of the world, especially male domination over women. This suffering servant who is undergoing passive suffering with powerless Asian women and who is also accompanying them in their struggle for liberation by doing liberation is the prophetic Messiah who creates a new humanity for oppressed Asian women.¹⁰

Hyun Kyung continues with a section on another image of Jesus that Asian women have had to contend with, and that is the image of Jesus as Lord. Living in a context of authoritarian political and military rulers in different parts of Asia, and having to bow to cultures and philosophies such as Confucianism that demand allegiance to the power and authority of males, and being a region that has experienced some of the worst effects of Western colonialism, such an image is received with suspicion by Asian women. Again drawing from the writings of women theologians, she concludes that "Jesus' lordship then, says no to patriarchal domination, freeing Asian women from false authority and empowering them to obey only God and not men."¹¹

Exploring many new images of Jesus, some of which are female, emerging in Asia, she challenges the theology of the church which speaks of revelation from above:

Theology based on revelation from above can easily be distorted into a theology of domination because this theology is based on the abstract thinking of the head and not on the concrete experience of the body. It is based on distant (and largely male) intellectualism and not on the everyday, experiential reality of Asian women. Some Asian women find Jesus in the most ordinary, everyday

9. Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again, Introducing Asian Women's Theology*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, USA, 1990, p. 55.

10. Chung Hyun Kyung *ibid*, p. 57

11. Chung Hyun Kyung, *ibid*, p. 59

experience. They see the revelation of God from below, from the bottom, the earth. They refuse any kind of heroism. They are not looking for great men and women to worship. Rather they want to find God, the saving presence within their daily lives.¹²

Christ comes to us women today!

This we believe in, that Jesus accompanies us women in our everyday experiences of life and in our struggles to find justice and a violence-free world. It is a faith that knows no boundaries, a faith that sustains us in our struggles for life. Jesus is that theology of life - God with us. I conclude with this poem I wrote for this article:

Christ came to us women today,
 He celebrated along with us our small victories.
 A poem we wrote together, rather than spend endless times weeping.
 A song of liberation we sang together, as we walked another mile as sisters in struggle.
 A theology of resurrection we wrote together, as we deconstructed all that is unjust.
 A dance of freedom we danced, dancing away all that creates disharmony and causes us rage.
 Christ came to us women today,
 He promised to walk that journey with us.

Christ came to her, my sister, today,
 He wept with her as she wept tears of pain,
 A poem of love he wrote to her to remind her that God cares.
 A song of liberation he sang for her, challenging her to reclaim her power to struggle.
 A theology of resurrection he wrote for her, empowering her to refuse the theology of sacrifice.
 A dance of freedom he danced with her, giving her the strength to stand up with him and dance.

12. Chung Hyun Kyung, *ibid*, p. 71

Christ came to us women today,
He promised to walk that journey with us.

Christ came to the church today,
He wept for her as he saw her lack of courage and strength
A poem of love he wrote for her to remind us of his passion and
compassion.
A song of liberation he sang to awaken her to his message of salvation
for this cruel world
A theology of resurrection he wrote when he called on us to live in right
and just relationships.
A dance of freedom he danced, giving us the challenge to stand up
and dance for him.
Christ came to the church today,
He promised to walk that journey with us.

Women's Programme
Justice Peace Creation Unit
World Council of Churches, Geneva.

Aruna Gnanadason

JESUS - THE EMBODIMENT OF GOD'S COMPASSION

With a keen sensitivity to the psyche of the Indian women Elke Hoffmann explores the different dimensions of the emerging feminist Christology in India. She describes how Indian women find in Jesus an inspiration to protest against violence caused by male domination in the Church and in secular society. She reflects on symbols like wisdom, blood and bread, which Indian women prefer to use in order to understand the mystery of Christ; these are symbols which resonate with the suffering and hopeful psyche of the Indian women. Elke Hoffmann is a young theologian from Germany; she spent over a year in South India (1995-96) studying the emerging trends in Indian Feminist Theology. She now works in a parish in the Church of Bavaria.

Jesus and women - this theme evokes the question on how Indian women see Jesus. Asked to write an article on Jesus and women from a feminist-theological point of view, I will try to answer this question, concentrating on a few aspects. Indian women see Jesus from different points of view: as the suffering human, as the symbol of life, as wisdom incarnate, as... But these different views come together in their belief in Jesus as the embodiment of God's compassion and the source of new life.

Introduction

For Indian Christian women Jesus Christ is *central* in their struggle for full humanhood and life. In the person and praxis of Jesus Christ they find God's solidarity and compassion with the oppressed and at the same time the source for their liberation from all discrimination and alienation. They see Jesus as a true human, who lived against the hierarchical and patriarchal culture of his time and believe that he "in his lifetime transformed the community of believers, earnestly attempting to renew their lifestyle - and for this he gave his life."¹

1. Gnanadason, Aruna, "An Agenda for Church Women", *Meadows*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (August 1993), pp. 22-24, here p. 23.

Their faith in Jesus stands against a tradition which sees Jesus as the male image of God, as "a triumphal king and an authoritarian High Priest,"² a view which has justified male dominance in theology and church and perpetuated the subordinate status of women. Therefore the women are searching for new Christological interpretations, which are liberating and relevant for their own lives, their experiences, their context.

This intention is clearly expressed in the final document of the intercontinental women's conference in Oaxtepec 1986:

"By reflecting on the incarnation, that is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we have come to realise the need to contextualize our Christology in the oppressed and painful realities of our continents. This means that Christology is integrally linked with action on behalf of social justice and the defence of each person's right to life and to a more human life."³

Indian women criticise Christological affirmations which are used to subordinate the powerless and to justify the powerful in church and society. Instead they ask: Who is Jesus for us? Where is Jesus, when we are beaten, raped and burnt? Where is Jesus in the pain of childbirth, childcare and the struggle for food? What kind of male is Jesus?

Christology has to take into account these questions in order to interpret the life and work of Jesus in a way which is relevant for Indian women today.

Therefore the feminist theologian Monica Melanchthon puts the goal of feminist Christology in the following words:

"For me the goal of feminist christological discourse pivots in its fullness around the flourishing of poor Dalit women in violent situations. Only when the poorest, raped and brutalised Dalit woman in an Indian village, the epitome of victims of sexism, casteism, and classism and at the same time a startling example of women's resiliency, courage, love and dignity – when such a woman with dependent children and her sisters

2. Summary Statement on Christology, in *Asian Women Doing Theology*. Report from Singapore Conference November 20-29, 1987, Hong Kong 1989, pp. 165-167, here p. 165.

3. Final Document: Intercontinental Women's Conference (Oaxtepec, Mexico, Dec. 1-6, 1986), in Febella, Virginia / Oduyoye, Mercy Amba: *With Passion and Compassion*, p. 187f.

in this country come to live peacefully in the enjoyment of their human dignity, only then will Indian feminist christology arrive at its goal."⁴

Indian Christian women work with new ideas in order to represent or to refill traditional Christological affirmations in a manner that is meaningful and relevant in their context. Chung Hyung Kyung calls that a "*Christological transformation* created out of Asian women's experiences as they struggle for full humanity. The old Christological paradigms are transformed, new meanings are achieved, and diverse images of Jesus Christ emerge."⁵

The suffering Jesus

One of the traditional images which women find helpful to use is that of the suffering Jesus. In the Final Conference Statement of Singapore Conference the women write: "The Asian women's understanding of Jesus is that of one who transcends the evil order of patriarchy. Jesus is the prophetic Messiah, whose role is that of the suffering servant, who offers himself as a ransom for many. Through his suffering Messiahship he creates a new humanity ... Women participate in the messianic prophetic role of Jesus through the suffering of oppressed women and through the solidarity and struggle of women who seek freedom from patriarchal structures."⁶

Using traditional images like "suffering servant", "ransom for many", "Messiah", "prophetic Messiah" the women see a connection between the suffering Jesus and their own suffering. In this context they emphasize the humanity of Jesus. Monica Melanchthon describes Jesus as a true human, "lying in the cradle, growing, learning, feeling the pangs of hunger, thirst, anxiety, doubt, grief and finally death and burial."⁷ In Jesus God is embodied as a human, he is God-with-us (Emmanuel). He is the

4. Melanchthon, Monica J. "A Fresh Look at Jesus Christ", Paper presented to the 23rd Quadrennial Assembly of the National Council of Churches in India, Nagpur 4th March 1996, p.9

5. Chung, Hyung Kyung; *Struggle to be the Sun again. Introducing Asian Women's Theology*, New York 1990, p. 62

6. Conference Statement, in: *Asian Women Doing Theology*, pp. 339-341., here p.340.

7. Melanchthon, Monica, "Christology and Women", in: *Asian Women Doing Theology*, pp. 181-188, here p, 181

"representative of new humanity."⁸ and in his human life he shares also the experiences of suffering and injustice in this inhuman world.

The life-experience of most women in India is imprinted by oppression and suffering and it seems natural that women meet Jesus in and through these experiences. Jesus shares the experience of suffering. But the women see also the danger which lies in the "glorification of suffering". Affirming the suffering of Jesus in such a way, that suffering becomes a value in itself and has to be imitated, is the trap in which women's lives are ensnared. Therefore it is important to say that the suffering of Jesus does not imply that women *have* to sacrifice their own lives and to suffer like Jesus. They distinguish between sacrifices which lead to life or sacrifices which lead to death. Indian women therefore say: "Suffering that is inflicted by the oppressor and is passively accepted does not lead to life; it is destructive and demonic."⁹

Indian women are struggling against a theology of sacrifice which makes a pastor tell a woman who was battered by her husband every single day of her married life: "Go back to him...learn how to adjust to his moods...don't do anything that would provoke his anger... Christ died and suffered for you on the cross...Can't you bear some suffering too?"¹⁰ But the women don't believe any longer in this theology of sacrifice, which makes them scapegoats and supports the patriarchal behaviour pattern of men. They believe that Jesus suffered because he lived a new humanity. A group of Indian women's writes: "Christ died on the cross because humankind could not bear his disturbing and uncomfortable message of salvation for the world. By his death he saved the world from its hypocrisy, apathy and selfishness - he was the scapegoat for a wicked, cruel world. Christ gave himself for a purpose."¹¹

8. Ibid., 183. Against traditional interpretations where the maleness of Jesus is used to subordinate women, Monica Melanchthon emphasizes on the mystery of the two natures of Jesus Christ and on Jesus Christ's humanness instead of his maleness.
9. Final Document: Intercontinental Women's Conference (Oaxtepec, Mexico, Dec, 1-6, 1986), in O Febella, Virginia M.M /Oduyoye, Mercy Amba (eds.): *With Passion and Compassion. Third World Women Doing Theology*, Maryknoll/New York 1988, pp. 184-190, here p. 188.
10. Quoted from: Gnanadson, Aruna, *No longer a Secret. The church and violence against women*, Risk Book Publications, WCC Publications, Geneva 1993, p.1.
11. *The National Situation: A biblical response from women*, *Stree Reflect Series* 1, An All India Council of Christian Women (NCCI) Publication 1986, p. 21.

The theology of sacrifice that is thrust on Indian women can be seen not only in the advice of the pastor mentioned above. It can be seen in the cases of raped women who commit suicide, because they would sacrifice themselves rather than allow their husbands and families suffer the ignominy of living with a raped woman! In the Indian context the sacrifice of young women on the altar of greed for more dowry is an example of the senseless loss of innocent lives. Women bear silently taunts and abuse, sometimes battering, within the family, sacrificing their self-esteem for the sake of the family honour and their children.

"Women are the scapegoats within this theology of sacrifice. What women have to discover for themselves is the resurrection element in their sacrifice, as a step towards a discovery of their power."¹² They accept only sacrifices which are part of their struggle for full humanhood – the anticipation of the resurrection in this life.

Jesus suffered under a system which denied humanhood. Women suffer under a patriarchal system which denies the humanhood of women. They see a parallelism between the suffering Jesus and themselves in their suffering but also in the sacrifices for the struggle against the system of patriarchy, hierarchy, and oppression and in creating a new humanity.

Therefore Indian Christian women believe in Jesus who "made visible the suffering face of God. He was born in poverty, fasted in the desert and preached good news to the poor and repentance to the rich. He shocked his own disciples by taking water from a Dalit woman and recruiting women in large numbers to be his followers. He was crucified for being truly a new human being in the image of God. [...] His life, death and resurrection are a promise that change is possible and death is not the last word."¹³

The Cross of Death and the Tree of Life

The connection between death and life, between suffering, struggling, and living is clearly expressed in a painting of Lucy D' Souza. The centre of her painting "The Female Image of God"¹⁴ is the "Tree of Life". The tree that bears crucifixion is the evergreen mango-tree. In the hot summer season it bestows shade, in the rainy-season it is a shelter, from its leaves

12. Ibid., p.22

13. Dietrich, Gabriele "Feminist Creed", In *God's Image*, Sept. 1990, p.54

14. Painted 1990, Original in Haus Missio, Munich/Germany

the Indians make garlands to decorate their houses on holy days, and its fruits are very tasty. The children play in its shade and the old sit under its branches in the evening.

The crucified person is painted in different nuances of brown colour and forms the stem of the tree. The arms are the two main branches from which smaller branches, leaves and fruits grow. The crucified is surrounded by three women and one man who embrace the tree. The crucified and the tree are one and the picture leaves open whether the crucified person is male or female.

While thinking about the motif of the centre of the picture Lucy D'Souza had a particular women's movement in mind – the Chipko – movement. This movement started 300 years ago in Rajasthan, when around 300 women sacrificed their lives to protect their holy trees which had to be cut. They embraced and clinged on the trees so that many died when the trees were cut. The Maharaja, who had ordered to cut the holy trees was so impressed by this action that he commanded not to cut a tree when a woman embraced it and called it a brother – the tree and the embracing person became one.¹⁵

With the suffering tree of life at the centre of her painting the artist tries to express the identification of women with Jesus. Women sacrifice their lives for their children, their family, for the holy trees, for a healthy environment, for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. But the sacrifice is not the end because it is, like the sacrifice of Jesus, a sacrifice for life - women and men are embracing the suffering tree of life and trying to revive it. "They are one with the tree which symbolises the cosmos of life."¹⁶ The picture shows the connection between death and life. The cross is the symbol of injustice and violence, but it is also a symbol of resurrection and the new life which starts now.

In her picture Lucy D'Souza expresses what the final statement of the "Women Against Violence" dialogue four years later requests: "We must deconstruct the symbol of the cross as it is used to glorify death, legitimate violence, including violence against women. The cross must

15. Cf. Shiva, Vandana, *Staying Alive; Women Ecology and Survival in India*, Kali for Women: New Delhi, 5th ed. 1995.

16. D'Souza Lucy: The Female Image of God. A Painting from Lucy D'Souza, Explanations published by MISSIO Munich, p. 4.

be reconstructed as a symbol of unjust state violence. It must also be connected to life as the tree of life from which new life grows."¹⁷

A reconstruction of the cross like the one mentioned above Judith Sequeira expresses in the following text. In her poem "My Cross" she sees the cross as a symbol of unjust violence but at the same time as a promise for liberation and life. It is her own cross – the cross of her oppression, her struggle for freedom, her hope.

My cross

My cross is a rainbow coloured cross,
Violet, Indigo, Blue, Green, Yellow, Orange, Red,
Colours of the rainbow,
A rainbow showed centuries ago to Noah
In a promise never to destroy life again,
In a promise fulfilled two thousand years ago,
Redeeming humankind
On the cross.

My cross is a rainbow coloured cross,
To liberate all,
North and South, East and West,
Black and White, Yellow and Brown
Male and Female.

My cross is a rainbow coloured cross,
For I am blue with the pain of oppression
And blue with the struggle for freedom
And green with hope.

As I walk the royal (violet) road of liberation
With flowers yellow, orange and red,
Springing up in celebration,
Of new life,

17. Final Statement of the "Women Against Violence" Dialogue, *Voices from the Third World*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, pp 211-219, here p. 217

Creating a new spring
Of eternal liberation
In the resurrection of Christ.¹⁸

The cross of Jesus symbolises injustice and violence (death), but it is also a sign that this is not the end. Christians can see the cross only in connection with the resurrection – after Good-Friday follows Easter. Liberation can be experienced here and now. It is not something which has to do only with our souls in the next life, in eternity. The cross of Jesus symbolises that even in oppression, in the struggle for justice and freedom there is the hope of new life – God's kingdom which is among us and will come.

Jesus - Wisdom Incarnate

In the relationship between cross and resurrection lies the hidden question of the understanding of the relationship of the historical Jesus of Nazareth to the risen Christ of faith, and therefore also the understanding of the relationship of the two natures of Jesus Christ. In the process of explaining the mystery of the incarnation, the church assumed that Jesus being a male is not a historical incident but an ontological necessity. This particularisation of the maleness of Jesus led to the idea that, because Christ became flesh as a male, only male can represent Christ on earth. This belief has resulted in the discrimination of women in the (Indian) church, denying women the full participation in the life and work of the church.

The Indian feminist theologian Monica Melanchthon makes a new attempt to understand the mystery of the two natures to liberate the understanding of Jesus Christ from the identification with the male principle. She asks: "Can the resurrected Christ in the redeemed order of creation be identified with the male principle? Has not the resurrected Christ transcended all particularities?"¹⁹

One possible way to unlock the mystery of the two natures of Jesus Christ is to speak of Jesus metaphorically as Wisdom or Sophia incarnate. This concept of Wisdom is primarily derived from the wisdom-

18. Sequeira, Judith, "My Cross", *IGI*, No.2 (1991)p.18

19. Melanchthon, Monica J.: A Fresh Look at Jesus Christ, Paper presented to the 23rd Quadrennial Assembly of the National Council of Churches in India, Nagpur 4th March 1996, p. 9

tradition of the Hebrew Bible, where God is, as *hochma* or *sophia*, immanent in creation, revelation and redemption – as the immanent transcendence in this world. This concept of *sophia* is akin to the Christian concept of *logos* or “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14) and, that is the new connection Monica Melanchthon elaborates, to the Indian concept of *cit* or intelligence. She writes: “By personifying Christ as Wisdom, we are able to transcend the particularities of gender, or caste and focus instead on the ministry of this incarnate wisdom”.²⁰

The book of Proverbs describes the character of Wisdom. There Wisdom is seen as a “street preacher and a prophet preaching a message of reproach, punishment and promise in the market place and at the city gates. She proclaims security from evil to those who listen to her and calamity and destruction to those who don’t (Prov 1:20-30).”²¹ She is seen as knowledge, insight and truth (8:6f.14). She loves those who love her (Prov 8:17), she walks the way of righteousness along the paths of justice (v.20). She was there before the beginning of the earth (v.22-26) and was with YHWH while it was created (v. 27-31). She is the wisdom by which YHWH founded the earth and established the heaven (3:19). This togetherness of YHWH and Wisdom by creating the world indicates for Monica Melanchthon “that creation was not the outcome of the act of a single male deity but was performed in solidarity with the female principle of Wisdom.”²²

Wisdom appears again in Prov 9 as construction worker, butcher and winemixer (v. 1f). She seeks people, finds them on the road and invites them saying: “Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed” (v. 3-5). The examples show, that in the book of Proverbs “Wisdom is presented as a personified figure who is both transcendent, and one who enters into the human realm, provoking and testing, sympathetic and setting right the wrong, and as someone in whom Yahweh finds pleasure, for she is someone who is constantly involved in inviting human beings to accept life in all its fullness.”²³

Wisdom as described above seems to be both: transcendent and immanent - transcendent immanence and immanent transcendence. Therefore Wisdom has been identified as the female personification of

20. Ibid.,p. 10.

21. Ibid.,p.10f.

22. Ibid., p. 11

23. Ibid..

YHWH or as the discerning intelligence in YHWH. The understanding of the latter is for Monica Melanchthon close to the Indian concept of *cit*. The sanskrit term *cit* is a feminine noun which can be translated as thought, mind or intelligence. It is a wisdom which is innate and, in conjunction with experience, brings out the realisation of the ultimate reality or the divine.²⁴ With the help of this concept the innate knowledge of YHWH can be understood. The knowledge with whose help YHWH created the cosmos and which aids YHWH being active in the world *Cit*, the wisdom of YHWH and YHWH are inseparable.²⁵

In Jesus *Cit* or Wisdom became incarnate in this world. His life and ministry show the realisation of God's wisdom.

"Jesus - *Cit's* ministry, suffering and victory and the possibility of new life and community that is offered symbolises Jesus' love for all of humanity, for the outcast, and most of all for women too. Through a ministry of love, Jesus evoked hope, a vision and a present experience of liberating relationships that women, the lowest of the low, the dalit of the dalits could savour. As the incarnate child of wisdom, Jesus walked the paths of justice and peace and invites others to do so. He interacted with all classes of people irrespective of gender, class or race in mutual respect, support, comfort and challenge and died on the cross for it."²⁶

In Jesus' death on the cross the participation of God in the suffering of this world is revealed. The cross is part and symbol of the mystery of the transformation of pain and death into life, which is so familiar to women through the rhythm of pregnancy, delivery and birth.

The knowledge of this transforming mystery enabled women to be present at Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. Because of this knowledge they were powerful witnesses of their own courage as women as well as their close relationship with the crucified Jesus.

"Like Jesus- *Cit* they are crying out for justice, for the plight that they and the world are in. Jesus Christ as *cit* does not ignore the reality of women or the cosmos, but identifies with the pain and the violence that women experience on the various crosses they

24. Cf. *ibid.*, p.10, footnote 23.

25. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 12

26. *Ibid.*,

chose to bear. But the story of Jesus' ministry does not end on the cross. Faith in the resurrection enables us women to witness Wisdom's gift of new transformed life and a promise of a future for all humanity and the cosmos."²⁷

For Monica Melanchthon the identification of Jesus with the feminine principle of *cit* allows women (and men) to liberate Jesus from male emphasis and the consequent androcentric dogmas. She says: "It enables us to place Jesus within an inclusive framework that is indicative of the relationship that Jesus shared with both human beings and with God. This metaphorical understanding also enables us to think of qualities of hospitality, goodness, graciousness, life giving creativity, a thirst and passion for justice which are characteristic of Jesus' ministry and mission, characteristics that should be imitated by the church if it is to be a credible witness in the world."²⁸

The emphasis on the mystery of the divine and human nature of Jesus Christ, enables and encourages women and men to transcend the maleness of the historical Jesus in developing an image of Jesus as incarnate feminine Wisdom or *cit*. In liberating Jesus from his maleness lies the chance to liberate Christology from its oppressive impact on women in the life and ministry of the church.

The Blood of Life

For Indian women another element shows the mystery between life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the relationship of this to their own lives - the symbol of blood.

Traditional theology says that Jesus Christ poured his blood for the forgiveness of sins which block the way to God. But Indian women try to understand the symbol of blood in a new way. They see a connection between their own blood and the blood-shed of Jesus.

In nearly all religions all over the world the blood of women seems to be unclean. As mentioned above this has consequences for the daily life of Indian women even today. It is the regular periodicity of menses that is the guarantee of the regularity of nature, but this life-giving blood of women was the reason that women were called unclean and excluded from full humanhood. It was the reason for oppression of and violence against women, even when blood was/is worshipped as a life-giving

27. Ibid., p.13

28. Ibid..

element as in India. Even today in India there are some temples where fertility cults are celebrated, which are connected with female blood.

In Guwahati, Assam, the Khamkya temple is dedicated to *yoni* (female genitals) worship. There is no image of the goddess in the temple, but in the shrine there is the *yoni*-shaped cleft in the rock which is kept moist with a blood-coloured flow (caused by a natural spring). Once a year, after the first burst of monsoon, the water runs red with iron-oxide. At that time a great ceremony takes place celebrating the blood-like flow which symbolises the menstrual blood.

Another fertility cult takes place at Malmaruvathoor temple around 60 km from Madras, which is dedicated to the Goddess *Adi Parashakti* (the supreme form of female power), where women in red saris (symbolising blood) worship the gift of creativity and life.²⁹

This still living worship of the life-giving symbol of blood is the reason for the feminist theologian Aruna Gnanadason to demand from Christian feminist theologians to "reclaim this powerful symbol of creativity of women drawing inspiration from blood- that which cleanses and prepares the environment for new life."³⁰

Blood sustains life, blood is a symbol of life and fertility – to shed blood means to hurt and to destroy life. The connection between the life -giving blood of women, the blood of their oppression and suffering, and the blood-shed of Jesus is expressed by Gabrijele Dietrich in a poem,³¹ which says that the monthly blood-shed of women makes them aware that blood is meant for life. But in reality the blood of women cries out - the blood of being raped, of abortions, of operations, of sacrifices. In one stanza writes:

"I am a woman
and the blood
of my sacrifices
cries out to the sky
which you call heaven.

29. Cf.: Gnanadason, Aruna, "What do These Women speak of?" *Voices from the Third World* Vol. XVI No. 1, pp. 33-47, here pp.40f.

30. *Ibid.*, 41.

31. The whole poem is interpreted in: Chung, Hyung: *Struggle to be the Sun again*, pp.66-71

I am sick of you priests
who have never bled
and yet say:
This is my body
given up for you
and my blood
shed for you
drink it.

I am sick of you priests
who rule the *Garbagriha*,
who adore the womb
as a source for life
and keep me shut out
because my blood
is polluting."³²

Gabriele Dietrich emphasises the connection between the blood-shed of Jesus and the blood-shed of women. The violent shed of the blood of Jesus, of the blood of women, of the blood of everybody who suffers under oppression, injustice and violence cries to heaven, it cries for life to live a life-worth life, it cries for justice. Blood is meant for life, blood symbolises life – and that means not to put up with the destroying forces of death, but to struggle against the life-denying structures of the social death, which marks human beings as unclean and untouchable.

Indian women reclaim blood as a life-giving symbol – blood symbolises life as Jesus said: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is shed for many." (Mt 26:28)

Jesus - the Bread for the Hungry

As Jesus is the blood of life he is also the bread of life.

For most inhabitants of the western countries it is a matter of course that they have enough to eat and to drink, that they have what they need for daily life. That is totally different from India, where around 50% of the people live under the poverty line. They have to struggle for their daily

32. Dietrich, Gabriele, One Day I shall be like a Banyan Tree, Belgium (Dileep S. Karmat) 1985, p. 34.

food, wake up hungry in the morning, go to sleep hungry in the night. If there is some food in the house, the women give it first to their husbands and their sons, then to their daughters and what is left over they can eat themselves. The experience of hunger is existential in the lives of the most Indian women. They "live without living" and "die without dying".³³ What does it mean for these women when Jesus says: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (Jn 6:35)?

A poem of an Indian woman expresses very clearly, what Jesus as the bread of life means in her daily life:³⁴

Every noon at twelve
In the blazing heat
God comes to me
in the form of
Two hundred grams of gruel.

I know him in every gram
I taste him in every lick.
I commune with Him as I gulp
For He keeps me alive, with
Two hundred grams of gruel.

I wait till next noon,
and now know he'd come;
I can hope to live one day more
For you made God to come to me as
Two hundred grams of gruel.

I know now that God loves me-
Not until you made it possible.
Now I know what you're speaking about
For God so loves this world

33. The formulations are taken from the poem "Tomorrow is Ours" (Anonymous) in, *Reading The Bible As Asian Women. Twelve Bible Studies On Mobilizing Women in Struggles For Food, Justice and Freedom*, Christian Conference of Asia (Women's Concerns Unit), Singapore 1986, p. 73.

34. This poem is also interpreted in Chung, Hyung Kyung: *Struggle to be the Sun again*, pp. 72f

That He gives His beloved son
Every noon through you.³⁵

The Indian woman expresses in her poem that she meets God/Jesus everyday in 200g of gruel. She feels him, tastes him, shares his meal with him. For her Jesus is really the "bread of life" for the 200g of gruel keep her alive. Food makes her alive. Hungry, starving people experience God "in every grain". "When the grain from the earth sustains their life, they discover the meaning of the phrase 'for God so loves this world that he gives his beloved son.' When God gives them food through other concerned human beings, God gives them God's beloved son', Jesus Christ. "³⁶

Jesus becomes flesh in a new sense for he gives himself "in every grain". He is embodied in this grain and becomes one with the hungry. Jesus Christ is not any longer an abstract principle but embodied in the day to day struggle for life.

Jesus - the Embodiment of God's Compassion

How do Indian women see Jesus?

They see Jesus embodied in the sufferings and sacrifices of women, and is the source of the transformation of these sacrifices into a life of equality, justice and peace. The symbol of this embodiment is the cross – the symbol of injustice and violence and at the same time the tree of life from which new life grows. They see Jesus as the incarnation, the embodiment, of the female wisdom, which identifies itself with the pain and violence women bear and gives the gift of new transformed life and the promise of a future.

They see Jesus embodied in the violent shed of blood of everybody who suffers under oppression, in the life -giving blood of women and in the life-sustaining blood of every human.

They see Jesus embodied in every grain which appeases hunger and becomes one with the hungry.

Jesus is for Indian women not someone who is far in heaven and preached from pulpits. Jesus is embodied in their day to day life – their suffering, their sorrows, their struggle, their hope and their power.

Elke Hoffmann

35. In: O' Grady, Alison (ed.), *Voices of Women. An Asian Anthology*, Asian Christian Women's Conference: Singapore 1978, p. 11.

36. Chung, Hyung Kyung: *Struggle to be the Sun again*, p. 73.

PAUL AND WOMEN: A CRITICAL REFLECTION

Sr. Pauline Chakkalakal makes an exegetical analysis of two of the so-called anti-women texts of the apostle Paul. She shows that Paul is not demanding a blind subordination of women to men, but as apostle he is concerned about the integrity of the community and the rightful role of women in the church, where there should be no distinction between man and woman. Women covering the head in assemblies is therefore a culturally conditioned praxis that works as a sign of freedom and dignity, authority and equality in the Corinthian community. It is an epochal demand on the male-dominated church today to recapture the Pauline vision of the Christian equality of men and women, and to enable women to participate in all the ministries of the church. Pauline is a doctoral student at Vidyajyoti, Delhi.

Paul has been labelled a "woman hater" because of his alleged statements on the role and status of women. "Maligned on the one hand, exonerated on the other, Paul himself is lost behind a barrage of claims and counter claims".¹ Many hold him responsible for negating the freedom won for women by Jesus and denigrating them to a subservient position. Throughout the centuries and even today Pauline authority has been invoked to perpetrate female domestication in the church. In fact Pauline literature in the NT "has formed the battleground upon which women's issues in the church have been contested".²

The apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in Pauline letters can be understood only when they are viewed from the socio-cultural and religious milieu of Paul and of his Christian communities. His Jewish-Hellenistic background is to be kept in mind. This is important because every individual is conditioned and influenced by his/her environment

-
1. Don Williams, *Paul and Women in the Church* (Glendale: Gospel Light, 1977) p. 11
 2. Brendan Byrne, *Paul and the Christian Women* (Homebush: St. Paul Publications, 1988), p. XIII.

and education. It would be naive to think that Paul was free from the influence of a patriarchal society that considered women as second class citizens.

There are five major texts in the Pauline corpus that directly address the question of the roles of women and men: 1 Cor 11: 2-16; 1 Cor 14: 33-38; Eph 5:22-23; Col 3: 18-19; 1 Tim 2:8-15. In addition, 1 Tim 5: 1-2 and Tit 2: 1-6 provide instructional material on the basis of age and sex differences. This paper will examine two key texts from 1 Corinthians (11:2-16 and 14: 33-38) that are authentically Pauline. Studying these texts within their own contexts will throw light on Paul's so-called anti-woman stand. This will be followed by a brief survey of women's partnership in Pauline mission.

A. Women should cover their heads (1 Cor 11:2-16)

In this section, Paul's main concern is discipline and order in liturgical assemblies. The focal point here is the issue of head covering for men and women. Judging from the passage as a whole we can say that Paul is giving a concrete rule of order: in worship services, men should leave their heads uncovered, while women should cover their heads. His reasons for issuing such order are mainly two:

1. 'theological' argument (11: 3-12)
2. appeals to 'reason' (vv. 13-15) and 'custom' (v.16)

1. Theological argument

Paul's reference to the creation account in Gen 2: 18-25 is central to the discussion of 1 Cor-11:2-16. With a view to understanding Paul's style of argumentation, we make a survey of the structure of the passage.

The structure may be presented in four sets of parallel statements, about man and woman respectively.³

- 1...the head of every man is Christ
the head of the woman is the man (v.3) (excluding the final phrase about God-Christ relation)
- 2...every man who prays.....dishonours his head (v.4)
any woman who prays.....dishonours her head (v.5a)

3. Ibid P. 41

3...a man ought not to cover his head...(v.7)

.....a woman ought to have a veil (bear authority) on her head (v.10)

4...there is neither woman without man

(woman is not independent of man)

.....nor man without woman in the Lord (v.11)

(nor man of woman in the Lord)

....Just as woman is from man,

.....so man comes to be through woman (v.12a)

Verses 5b-6 and 7bc serve to ground these parallel statements; verses 3c and 12b relate all to the ultimate source: God. The structure shows Paul's concern to bring out the distinctive situations of man and woman, while acknowledging the interdependence of both in God's plan. We shall make an attempt to understand the debated statements.

Headship of man (v.3b): meaning of 'head'

The Greek word *Kephale* like the Hebrew '*rosh*' and English 'head', has several figurative meanings. It never connotes 'authority', or 'superiority'. Among the range of meanings which *Kephale* has in ordinary Greek are 'origin', 'source', 'starting point', 'crown' or 'completion'.⁴ Paul's use of *Kephale* as 'source' or 'origin' agrees with the thrust of his argument in 11:2-16.

The LXX most frequently translates *Kephale* as the head of a man (Gen 28:11), of a beast (Gen: 3:16), the top of a mountain (Gen 8:5) or of a tower (Gen 11:4) etc.⁵ According to M. T. Brauch's findings, about 180 times *rosh* is used in the figurative meaning of 'leader' or 'chief' or 'authority figure' of a group. Thus the English 'head' and the Hebrew *rosh* frequently designate an authority figure.⁶

-
4. Berkeley and Alvera Michelsen, "What does *Kephale* mean in the New Testament?" in *Women, Authority & the Bible*, ed. by Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), pp. 97-110. See also Stephen Bedale, "The Meaning of *Kephale* in the Pauline Epistles," in *JTS*, 5(1954), 211-215.
 5. K. Munzer, "Head", in *NIDNT* II pp. 157-159; see also, Scroggs, R., "Paul and the Eschatological Women Revisited," in *JAAR*, 40 (1972), pp. 534-535, n. 8; H. Schlier, "*Kephale*...." in *TDNT*, III, p. 675.
 6. Manfred T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of Paul* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1989), p. 137.

In 1 Cor 11: 4,5 and 10 *Kephale* seems to denote physical head. But v.3 has a metaphorical meaning that would perhaps cover the three subjects: Christ, man and woman. The traditional meaning 'superior' does not occur in secular Greek. In Gospels too where the head or master of a household appears, *Kephale* is not used to designate an authority figure (e.g. Mt 10:25; 13:52; Lk 13:25; 14:21). The metaphorical meaning of 'source' (cf. Col 2:19) agrees well with the statements in v.8 and v. 12 : woman is 'from' man. Thus one's *Kephale* would mean the 'source of one's being'.⁷

The 'chain-like' statement in v.3 gives the impression that Paul is setting up a hierarchy of order. God-Christ-Man-woman. A certain measure of subordination is implied in the fact that the *Kephale* ('source') of every woman is the man (v.3). Paul's thesis here is based on the story of creation in Gen 2:21-23 in which Adam is presented as the origin of Eve's being. This idea is taken up again in vv. 8,12.

The apparent subordination however is mellowed in v.12b which affirms, "All things are from God". Therefore, God is the source of everything (cf. 1 Cor 8:6); both man and woman have their origin in God.

Dishonouring one's head (vv. 4-9)

To defend his position Paul works out a parallel between a man who prays with his head covered and a woman who does so with her head uncovered.

Any man who prays or
prophesies with his
head covered dishonours.
his head (v.4)

But any woman who prays or
prophesies *with her head*
unveiled dishonours her
head (v.5a); it is the same as if her head
were shaven (v.5b).

Verses 4 and 5a contain two balanced antithetical statements, whose arguments rest upon the literal and the metaphorical meanings of *Kephale*. In both cases, the first *Kephale* refers to the physical head and the second to the metaphorical in the sense of v.3.⁸

7. Cf. Schlier's definition of Paul's usage in this passage: "*kephale* implies one stands over another in the sense of being the ground of his being", *TDNT* III, p.679.

8. Murphy -O'Connor, J., argues that the second *kephale* in each case is equivalent simply to the reflexive pronoun 'himself/herself'. This makes v. 3 virtually redundant, see p. 485.

The 'why' of the woman's dishonouring her head is given in v.15. By the very fact she had been naturally provided with long hair, it is appropriate for her to use a veil, if not she might as well be shorn. Thus an unveiled woman shames 'her' head, and that of her metaphorical 'head': man. The reason is given in v.7c, where woman is spoken of as the glory of man. Instead the man who covers his head obscures the 'image and glory of God' which he is meant to be (vv. 4 and 7b).

Paul's argument in this passage is founded on the creation narrative of Genesis 2, where we read that woman was made after the man, from his side (Gen 2: 21-22). This leads Paul to say that "man was not made from woman, but woman from man" (v.8). In the same chapter, we find the reason for woman's creation: she was made as "a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:20). This leads Paul to his next statement, "neither was man created for woman, but woman for man" (v.9).

To grasp the meaning behind Paul's arguments, we must get back to the biblical notion of *doxa*, 'glory'. The Bible describes *doxa* as the manifestation or reflection in the created being of the glory of its Creator or origin. to quote M.T. Brauch, "that which is made, or emerges out of another, manifests or reflects the glory of its maker or origin".⁹ Thus, "the heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1; Ps. 96:3-8). Paul warns the Romans about the wrath of God against those who "exchanged the glory of the immortal God" (Rom 1:22-32). Jesus is presented as reflecting God's glory in his person and life (Jn 1:14; 13:31-32; 17:4; Col 1:27). Paul speaks of Christ as the very "image of God" (2 Cor 4:4) in whom "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" (2 Cor 4:6) is revealed.

Although Paul speaks of woman as the glory of man (11:7), he does not say that woman is the image of man. If he were to make such a statement, he would be betraying his own understanding of Gen 1:26-27, which speaks of the creation of human beings as male and female in God's image. It would also contradict his declaration in Gal 3:28 (cf. 1 Cor 12:13). Paul is aware of the fact that both man and woman derive their being ultimately from God (11:12) and woman, no less than the man, is the "image and glory of God" since she too is "from God". The reason for Paul's offensive statement about woman being the 'glory of man' (v.7) and not the 'glory of God' is "only a recognition of the temporal sequence

9. M.T Brauch, *Hard Sayings of Paul*, p. 145

of God's creative activity, since her being is derived from the being of Adam".¹⁰

Despite his apparently confusing reasoning, Paul does not deny the original intent of Gen 1:26, 28, which portrays man and woman equally in the image of God and sharing the God-given authority over the universe.

Authority upon her head (v.10)

The traditional understanding of 'authority' in terms of passivity on the part of woman has made this verse the most offensive statement of female subordination in the passage.

However, neither in Paul's writings (e.g., 1 Cor 7: 37; 8:9; 9:4; 11:10; 2 Cor 10:8; Eph 1: 21) nor in the whole range of Greek literature is *exousia* used in the sense of the passive acceptance of authority. The Greek word *exousia* always refers to the active exercise of authority with special reference to the legal capacity of the subject to act freely in his/her own right.¹¹ Therefore, 'authority' in v.10 cannot refer to a passive authority whereby the woman submits herself to man's authority. The usage in 1 Corinthians itself suggests the contrary, viz., the *exousia* must refer to the (active) authority, freedom of right to do something (cf. 1 Cor 9: 4-6, 12, 18; 2 Thess 3:9; 2 Cor 10:8) which the woman herself possesses.¹²

In this sense *exousia* functions as a key concept of Christian liberty in 1 Corinthians. In fact, he uses the word authority five times within the larger context of 1 Cor 8:14, always in the sense of Christian freedom for the sake of others and the promotion of the Gospel. A great deal of Paul's exhortation to the community in 1 Corinthians is on the right use of Christian freedom (cf. 6:12; 10:23; 9:4, 12; 7:37). In his preaching Paul had made it clear that by virtue of their Christian vocation, the Corinthians had entered into the freedom of the children of God, having free access to God (cf. Rom 5:1-2). Freedom certainly entails rights and responsibilities as intended by the Creator (Gen 1: 26-27; Ps. 8). Among the important rights especially relevant here was the right to pray and prophesy in the Christian assembly.

10. Ibid.

11. F. Foerster, "Exousia", in *TDNT*, II 262-63, 570-71

12. M.D. Hooker, "Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1 Corinthians 11:10." in *NTS* 10 (1963-64), pp. 410-416.

It is in this context that Paul's use of *exousia* occurs in v. 10 preceded by the 'headship' chain of v. 3. His instruction on the right attire in the Christian congregation is based on his idea of Christian authority originating from God and mediated through Christ. Therefore the woman enjoys her own authority to pray and prophesy in public. Her headdress should reflect the manner in which her authority comes. As M.T. Brauch has shown, by his choice of the word *exousia* instead of 'head covering', "Paul seems to suggest that by wearing the covering and thus conforming in her outward appearance with 'nature/custom' - the woman has authority".¹³

In this sense the veil is not a symbol of woman's subjection to man, but a sign of her being the 'glory' of man. Operative here are the presuppositions and customs prevalent in Paul's day. In his anxiety to project a 'good image' of the church, he exhorts Christian men and women to conform themselves to certain practices. With a view to justifying the common practice of women wearing a veil, Paul 'allows himself to be dragged into theological speculations that are typically Jewish, not Christian'.¹⁴

The equality of man and woman in the Lord (vv. 11-12)

Sensing that his theological exposition could be misunderstood, Paul now affirms that he acknowledges the equality of man and woman 'in the Lord': "In the Lord, woman is not independent of man nor man of woman" (v.11). He then qualifies his statement: "For as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God" (v.12). Verse 12, thus clearly states that Paul does not want to deny "the creational interdependence and mutuality of men and women".¹⁵ The phrases in v.11 suggest the interdependence of man and woman. Paul

13. M.T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of Paul*, p. 151. Recent studies also strongly support such an understanding of the text; cf. M.D. Hooker, "Authority on Her Head.....", pp. 410 -416.

14. John Wijngaards, *Did Christ Rule Out Women Priests?* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1978), p. 69

15. E.S. Fiorenza, In *Memory of Her. A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1983), p. 229. Having made a study of the Greek word this feminist scholar suggests that the best translation of v.11 would be, "In the Lord woman is not different from man nor man from woman".

is stressing the basic equality of man and woman 'in the Lord', thereby clarifying his position with respect to the preceding argument.

The implication, then, is that as Christians, men and women are equal, and this equality occurs 'in the Lord' - a clear echo of the unitive-liberative vision in Gal 3:28. The source of this fundamental equality is God: "All things are from God" (v.12b).

2. Appeal to 'reason' (v v. 13-15) and to 'custom' (v. 16)

Realizing that his scriptural arguments in favour of women's headcovering are rather weak, Paul now appeals to reason and custom: "Judge for yourselves; is it proper for a woman to pray to God with the head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her pride? For her hair is given to her for a covering " (vv. 13-15). Behind this reasoning is his belief that short hair is 'natural' for a man while long hair for a woman, hence ordained by God.

Fearing that his exhortation might be unheeded, Paul further insists on woman's headcovering by having recourse to the existing custom: "If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognise no other practice, nor do the churches of God" (v.16).

In the ancient world, ladies were expected to cover their hair, ears and forehead in public, or else they were not respected as women.¹⁶ Those who wore their hair in a disordered way presented themselves as unfeminine. Likewise, the wearing of long hair by men was associated with homosexuality in Greek culture.¹⁷ Paul feared that the unveiled women along with the long-haired men would contribute "to a blurring of sex distinctions - a literal living out of the Gal 3:28 ideal in the 'over realised' way typical of the Corinthians."¹⁸

16. Larissa Bonfante & Jaunzems, "Clothing and Ornament," in *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean Greece and Rome*, Vol III, ed. by Michael Grant & Rachel Kitzinger (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), pp. 1385-1413, esp. 1410-1411.

17. Murphy-O'Connor, "Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16," in *CBQ* 42 (1980), pp. 486-487. For further reading, see Philo (*Spec. Leg.* 3: 37-42) and Pseudo-Phocylides (sentences 210-14- text in P.W. van der Horst) as cited in Brendan Byrne, *Paul and the Christian Woman*, p. 57.

18. B. Byrne, *Paul and the Christian Women*, p.36.

According to Philip Sidon, wearing a veil was the symbol of marriage at that time. Taking off the veil meant a break in the marriage covenant leading to divorce. As another scholar points out, in ancient Corinth, for a woman to go unveiled would be to behave like a prostitute.¹⁹ An unveiled woman in public would be despised and insulted. Certainly Paul would not have encouraged a practice that would cause scandal and ridicule of the young Christian community. Therefore, he constantly urged the believers to follow a certain code of moral behaviour, including the subjection of wives at meetings. At any rate, what Paul says in Cor 11 is directed to a concrete community in its Hellenistic setting. He is not stipulating rules for all time.

Leading feminist scholar E.S. Fiorenza is of the view that long flowing dishevelled hair was a sign of the ecstatic prophetic behaviour associated with the cult of Dionysos, Cybele, Pythia, Sibyl and other deities.²⁰ Unbound hair was also a characteristic of the cult of Isis, which had a major centre in Corinth. Because of its liberative dimension and principle of equality, the Isis cult attracted the Corinthians. Fiorenza concludes that Christian women at Corinth considered their loose hair as a sign of ecstatic endowment with Spirit-Sophia and of true prophetic behaviour. Paul's apostolic zeal moved him to curb this pneumatic frenzy, in the interests of building up in the community an intelligible missionary proclamation, which according to him was the true sign of the Spirit.²¹

To Sum up, Paul's primary concern in 1 Cor 11:2-16 is order and decorum in places of worship and not a theology of woman's head-covering. He is reacting "to a situation of intense and sometimes unruly enthusiasm. The text is not to be taken as a textbook of theology, slowly matured and carefully expressed."²² His sole preoccupation is the building up of the Christian community. Hence he is bent on curbing any practice that might offend Jews or Greeks (10:32), and thereby hinder his gospel proclamation. In all fairness to Paul, we do well to admit that the "the goal of his argument, then, is not the reinforcement of gender differences but the order and missionary character of the worshipping community."²³

19. Pastor Andre Dumas as quoted by Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York; Harper & Row, 1968), p. 38.

20. E.S.Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*.....p. 22.

21. Ibid,p. 228.

22. L. Legrand, "There is Neither Slave nor Free, Neither Male Nor Female," *Indian Theological Studies*, 18:2 (June 1981), p. 159

23. E.S.Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*p. 230.

B. Women should remain silent in the church (1Cor 14: 34-35; cf. 1 Tim 2: 11-12)

Paul's next discussion on man-woman relationship, in the light of Genesis, appears in 1 Corinthians 14. The whole chapter deals with the subject of corporate worship in the Christian church. Most of Chapter 14, especially from v.26 contains a set of rules on "speaking in tongues and prophesying" so that there is no disorder in the assemblies. Towards the end of the letter, Paul writes:

As in all churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate (*hupotassomai*) as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church (1Cor 14: 34-35).

We shall make a simple survey of 14: 26-36 and pick up the three main rules applicable to three categories of people.

vv. 27-28 rules for glossolalists

vv. 29-33 rules for prophets

vv. 34-36 rules for wives

These are formulated in a similar structure thus:²⁴

vv. 27, 29,34 - general sentences of regulation

vv. 28,30,35 - complementary sentences for concretization

vv. 31-32, 34a, 35b - expanded reasons for regulation

v.36 -containing a double rhetorical question

1. The reasons for women's silence

Once again, as in chapter 11, we have Paul insisting on the maintenance of a Jewish Christian custom, and as in the previous chapter, it is a custom which was in fact congruent with Greek custom. It was not customary for men to talk to women in public.²⁵ In places of worship (synagogues), women were segregated from men. It is said that men

24. Ibid.

25. See, J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1969). p. 360. Among the Jews of that time, men were strongly discouraged from speaking in public to women. No wonder the disciples were surprised when they saw Jesus talking to a woman (Jn 4:27).

were frequently interrupted by their wives with questions which would better be answered at home. Deprived of substantial education in religious matters, most women found it difficult to grasp the interpretations of the scripture at meetings. Obviously they had to seek clarifications, and preferably from their own husbands.

We note that Paul's main concern here is discipline in the Corinthian church. The various charisms, such as speaking in tongues (v.26), gift of interpretation (v.26), prophecy (v.29) and all other gifts (cf. 1 Cor 12) are for the edification (v.26) of the community: "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification" (v.26 b-c). Every gift is to be used in the service of the Lord and for building up of his body, the church. Silence and listening are integral parts of Christian worship: "For, God is not a God of confusion, but of peace" (v.33).

2. Interpolation?

Several scholars are of the view that vv. 34-35 are an insertion in the Pauline corpus. H Conzelmann believes that the directives to women to keep silence in the church represent a later interpolation that cannot be attributed to Paul, precisely because it contradicts the spirit of chapter 11, where the active participation of women is presupposed.²⁶ In this regulation, we hear an echo of the 'pastoral letters', originated in the Deutero-Pauline circles (cf. 1 and 2 Timothy; Titus).

N. M. Flanagan and E. H. Snyder are of the opinion that vv. 33b-35 are not Paul's words but rather a quotation from the letter the Corinthians had written to him.²⁷ Paul quotes many sayings of the Corinthians in his letter (1 Cor. 1:12; 2:15; 6:12-13). Thus vv. 33b-35 may also be a quotation, introduced there in order to curtail women's activities in the church. In fact, this view falls in line with Paul's mention about women prophesying in the church (1 Cor 11:5) and his liberative vision in Gal 3:28.

Following the same trend of thought, Peter F. Ellis suspects that the ruling on women's silence originates from certain conservatives in the

26. H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 246; see also W.O Walker Jr., "1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and Paul's Views Regarding Women", in *JBL* 94 (March 1975), pp. 94-110.

27. N.M. Flanagan and E.H. Snyder, "Did Paul Put Down Women in 1 Cor 14: 34-36?", in *BTB* (January 1981), pp. 10-12.

Corinthian church. Paul cannot be held responsible for the harsh words of vv. 33b-35. The appeal to the law, "even as the law says" (v.34) sounds rather strange as coming from the mind of Paul.²⁸

Whatever be the merits of scholarly speculations, we find strong internal evidence for asserting the authenticity of vv. 34-35 as Pauline. All important manuscripts contain these verses. Does it mean that Paul was a woman-hater? How do we reconcile his liberative stand in Gal 3:26-29 with his conservative position in Corinthians?

The answer is to be found within the context of 1Cor 11 and 14. We have already seen that Paul's instructions pertained to order and discipline in public worship. Whatever hinders his missionary activity should be checked. Wherever disorder and confusion exist, restrictions ought to be imposed. The operative principle behind Paul's admonition to silence is his genuine concern in "building up the church" (14:12).

Interestingly, it is not just women who are banned from speaking, men too are called to be silent at certain times (vv. 28-30). Verse 26 states the indispensable principle: "Let all things be done for edification". This exhortation includes "a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation" (v.26). There is absolutely no suggestion here that only male members of the community have the monopoly of the gifts of the Spirit. The phrase *ekastros* "each one" in v.26 though masculine in form (unavoidable in a patriarchal set up), applies to both men and women. Paul's pre-supposition is that each person has something to contribute to the growth of the community.

To sum up, the injunction imposing silence on woman in 1 Corinthians, like all others, may be understood and interpreted in the light of its context and purpose. Considering Paul's attitude towards women elsewhere in the churches, he cannot be labelled as a male chauvinist, enjoining silence and subordination upon women in the Corinthian church. Romans 16 gives us a vivid description of Paul's association with prominent women, who are not the passive type "to keep silence in the church". We shall make a brief survey of women's participation in Pauline mission.

C. Women in Pauline Ministry

In this section our task is to discover the vigorous involvement of women in the mission of the church. Paul mentions a number of women

28. Peter F. Ellis, *Seven Pauline Letters* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1984), p. 103.

as his co-workers who laboured with him in the ministry of the Word. Unlike his male co-workers – Erastus, Mark, Timothy, Titus and Tychicus – who “stand in explicit subordination to Paul serving him or being subject to his instructions,”²⁹ these women were not Paul’s ‘helpers’ or ‘assistants’. They were leaders and animators of Christian communities. Far from despising them, Paul acknowledged their leadership role coupled with dedicated service and accepted their collaboration.

1. Phoebe (Rom 16: 1-2)

Phoebe was a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae. The Greek word *diakonos* (‘deacon’) is the same for masculine and feminine genders. The term means doing a particular service. It is an office that figures in the earliest days of church history.³⁰ Speaking of himself and Apollos (1 Cor 3:5) and Timothy (1 Thess 3:2), Paul uses the same Greek word *diakonos* and there are no scriptural or theological reasons for making a distinction between a woman’s function and that of male deacons.

Fiorenza’s study sheds further light on this.³¹ Against the argument of H. Lietzman and Otto Michel, Fiorenza affirms that Phoebe’s office in the church at Cenchreae is not limited by prescribed gender roles. She is not a deaconess of the women, but a minister of the whole church.

2. Prisca and Aquila

(Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16: 19-24; Acts 18; 2 Tim 4: 19-22)

In Rom 16:3 Paul mentions the missionary couple Prisca (Pricilla) and Aquila and the church in their house. “Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I but also all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks: greet also “the church in their house”.

Paul, as well as Luke testify to the effective and widespread ministry of Priscilla and Aquila in the Pauline period (Acts 18: 18-26). Obviously she shared with Aquila the task of a “fellow worker”. Paul’s affectionate greetings show how closely this couple worked with him in the ministry of the word. They exerted great influence on the Gentile churches.

29. E.E. Ellis, “Paul and His Co-Workers,” in *NTS* 17 (1970/71), p. 349.

30. Karl Rahner (ed.) *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol.2 (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1978), p. 56.

31. E.S.Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*....pp. 170-171.

3. Andronicus and Junia(s) (Rom. 16:7)

Another couple mentioned in Paul's greeting is Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7), who were his relatives and fellow prisoners. They were Jewish Christians and outstanding members of the circle of the apostles. Until recently most scholars doubted whether the name Junias designated a woman. The reason being prejudice on the part of scholars who "took it as unthinkable that the title 'apostle' could in any way apply to a woman".³²

Whatever be the prejudice, the fact is that Junia deserved the title 'apostle'. According to Paul, the mark of true apostleship consists in joyfully accepting the labours and sufferings as an integral and complementary part of missionary work (1 Cor 4:8-13 2 Cor chs 11-12). Andronicus and Junias fulfil these criteria of true apostleship. Paul himself attests to it in Rom 16:7.

There are other women leaders too who were Paul's mission partners (cf. Rom 16:6, 12; Philemon 1:2; Phil 4:2-3; Acts 16:11-40) who excelled in their missionary commitment, thus setting an example to the church in their respective areas. However, it is not the scope of this paper to dwell on them in detail.

It is significant to observe how Paul admonishes his Christians to be "subject to every co-worker and labourer" (1 Cor 16:16) and "to give recognition to such persons" (v.18). Nowhere in his letters does Paul advise his people to obey and respect only the male members of his team (cf. 1 Thess 5:12). On the contrary, he commends the work of all his co-workers, including that of women.

Shall we face the challenge?

In the light of this brief discussion, Paul does not appear to be a male chauvinist or misogynist. On the contrary, he acknowledged the important role women played in the early church both as apostles and ministers. He recognised their leadership in the realms of prayer, teaching, evangelising and administration. When considering the socio-cultural context of the society of his time, we understand Paul's reasons for the alleged imposition of restrictions on women. Faced with the threat of legalism on the one hand (Gal 1:1 - 2:10; 3: 1-5) and libertinism on the other (Gal 3: 26-29), Paul appears to be in a state of contradiction. The

32. B. Byrne, *Paul and the Christian Woman*, p. 72; see also Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Michigan: WB Eerdmans, 1973), pp. 533-535.

concept of equality of women and men as we understand and advocate today was not an issue for him. Moreover several of his disciplinary declarations were sociological in nature and not doctrinal. As such he was not proposing a teaching for all time. Therefore, we question: Are Paul's injunctions to women equally applicable in the cultural climate of our times? How much should the cultural situation existing in Paul's day be taken into account and allowed to influence contemporary interpretation?

If Paul were alive today, what would he say with regard to women's role and status in church and society? He who declared the freedom and oneness of all in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:26-29), would he not correct antifeminist theologians and pastors who invoke his authority in favour of female subordination in the church? I would think Paul would rewrite those texts dealing with the roles of women and men and admonish Christians, in particular the official teachers to apply the gospel principles or the liberative values of Jesus in their interpretations.

The use of scriptural texts to sustain women's powerlessness and silence in the church is incompatible with the God of the Bible who is involved in the struggle of people for freedom (Ex 3: 7-9). God's Word is liberative and empowering, not enslaving and dehumanizing. However, it comes to us mediated by human realities: human beings, languages and thought patterns which are conditioned by their particular age and culture. Hence we should be cautious so as not to be victimised by the androcentric and sexist elements in biblical texts. On the contrary, we should challenge the male-dominated and culture-bound interpretations which ignore the experiences of women and legitimise their low status in church and society.

Today when women have proven their effective leadership in many areas in the secular sphere, the official church is called to further the full and equal rights of christian women in all aspects of church's mission. Eligibility for any ministry should be determined not in terms of gender but in accordance with one's particular charisma and ability for leadership. The unjust exclusion of women from the church's ministerial government deprives them of any effective role in shaping its mission, liturgy, theology and laws. The patriarchal structures of the church are not conducive to women (also to laity in general) to make their unique contributions at various levels for building the community of God's people.

The church must recapture the original vision of Jesus and the liberative thrust of Paul, and move towards the realisation of a community

of "discipleship of equals". Only then shall there be no room for male domination and female domestication in the church. Instead, mutuality, inclusiveness, participatory decision-making and co-responsibility will become the hallmarks of its community. The official church should allow feminine energies and leadership skills to enliven and rejuvenate its existence.

It means a change of structure and a change of mind-set, and an ongoing internal and external conversion. Indeed this process demands creative criticism, openness, acceptance, inclusiveness and democracy - all urgent needs of our church and society today!

Daughters of St. Paul
143 Waterfield Road, Bandra
Mumbai - 400 050

Pauline C.

THE FATHER OF JESUS IS MOTHER

A Meditation on the Symbols of the Gospel according to John.

Sebastian Painadath offers a christological meditation on some of the key phrases and mystical symbols of the Gospel of John. He explores the deeper meaning of Jesus' use of the term Abba, Father, and shows that it evolves out of Jesus' intimate experience of the Divine as 'motherly Father'. This mother dimension of Jesus' experience provoked the Jews to sense blasphemy in his language. A rediscovery of the mystical depth of Jesus' experience and language would give rise to an integral spirituality in which the Divine is experienced as motherly Father/fatherly Mother. In the new community that grows out of this spirituality there will be 'no distinction between male and female', as Paul visualises it. Sebastian Painadath is the director of a christian Ashram in South India.

There are two primordial symbols to speak about the Divine in terms of a personal relation: father and mother. In most of the primal religions both the symbols are profusely used. In the Semitic religions there is a dominance of the use of the symbol 'father', while in the Indian religions the 'mother' symbol plays a significant role in speaking of God. Jesus belonged to the Semitic spiritual hemisphere and hence his language has been considerably conditioned by the historical and cultural factors of his country. Therefore it is not surprising that Jesus never addressed God as Mother. Does it therefore mean that the motherly dimension of God-experience has been lacking in his life and work? Is language merely a product of the cultural psyche? Is it not possible to dive below the surface of language and expression in order to discover the deeper dimensions of Jesus' experience of the Divine? Such a meditative entry into the inner world of Jesus in the light of the Gospel of John would reveal that the father-related language of Jesus evolved out of a mother-related experience of the Divine.

The Abba Experience

It has been rightly pointed out that the use of the symbol 'father' by Jesus does have a certain uniqueness: Jesus spoke of God as 'my Father'

with a deep intimacy (2:16; 5:17; 6:32; 8:19; 15:8). While addressing God Jesus used the vocative form Father without any qualification. (17:1,5,11,21,25; Mt. 11:25; Mk. 14:36; Lk. 10:21; 23:34,46). The term *Abba* in his mother tongue Aramaic actually means pappa, daddy - forms which children often use to call their father in an affectionate way. Jesus was not merely speaking about God the Father, but revealing his deepest intimacy with God whom he called Father. This is something that transcends the Semitic cultural psyche. Hence it is important that we go beyond the limitations of the cultural factors and explore the deeper significance of Jesus' experience.

At the time of Jesus the Jews did have forms of prayer addressed to God as Father. Hence there has been nothing objectionable in Jesus' use of this term. Yet, it is said, that they picked up stones to throw at him when he spoke of God as his Father (8:59; 10:39.) They seemed to have sensed blasphemy in his use of the term Father while speaking of God or speaking to God. 'He spoke of God as his own Father, and so made himself God's equal!' (5:18) A reflection on Jesus' invocation form would therefore demand that we go beyond the format of the patriarchal culture and explore the mystical meaning of Jesus' language. The God-consciousness of Jesus cannot just be explained in terms of the Semitic psyche, however important it is. What is decisive is not so much the name as the experience.

The Indian sages constantly demand that the true seekers should incessantly go beyond the sphere of names and forms (*nama roopa*) in pursuit of the Divine. This holds good in interpreting a concrete experience of divine revelation too. No categorical symbol can exhaust the transcendent mystery of the Divine. Hence every name and form, every religious symbol, is fragmentary in relation to the unfathomable mystery that eludes it. Search for God experience cannot get stagnated in the experiences of the past and get fixated on certain names and forms. It is rather an inner pilgrimage, a relentless quest and unending pursuit (*sadhana*), which alone would take the seeker into the inner recess of the mystery of reality.

Dimensions of the Abba Experience

In the God-consciousness of Jesus expressed in terms of Son - Father relation three dimensions could be noticed:

(i) **'The Father sent me'** (3:16; 4:34; 5:36-38; 7:28-29; 10:36; 17:3). Jesus had an abiding consciousness of being sent by the Father. Here the

Father is the one who sends the Son with the redemptive mission. The Son understands his mission as 'doing the will of the Father' (4:34; 5:30; 6:38), 'completing the work of the Father' (4: 34; 6:29; 9:3). What is perceived here is a certain distinction between the one who sends and the one who is sent. The relation between the Father and the Son is an *interpersonal* relation.

(ii) **'I am in the Father and the Father is in me'** (5: 26; 8:28; 14:10; 17:21; 23). Jesus knew that the Father who sent him is with him, in him. (8: 16, 29; 16: 32; 14: 10) Here the Father is the one who gives life to the Son from within. The Son constantly takes birth from the Father (5:26; 6:57; 8:24; 16:28). The Father is the source and generator of the Son. The Son is the expression and unfolding of the father. (14: 10; 12: 49) The relation between the Father and the Son is an *intrapersonal* relation.

(iii) **'The Father and I are One'** (10:30; 17:11,21,22.) This is the articulation of the deepest experience of Jesus in relation to the Divine. He had the consciousness that his being and life and work have been totally transparent to the Divine source, which he called the Father. Father and Son are essentially one. The being of the Father unfolds itself through the being of the Son. There is absolute unity between them. The relation between the Father and the Son is a *transpersonal* relation, in the sense that it goes far beyond the personalistic structures of human thought.

These three aspects of Jesus' consciousness are not to be taken as three phases or spheres, but as the three integral dimensions of his God-consciousness. Though in the Gospel the one symbol Father is used to describe all these three dimensions conditioned by the semitic language and patriarchal culture of his times - one could ask if this language has a deeper spiritual meaning and hence revelatory significance.

Father and Mother

Since the primordial symbols of father and mother are taken from the primal experience of human persons it may be good to explore their meaning in their life-context. Observe a little child sitting on the lap of its father and leaning fondly on the body of the father. The body contact with the father evokes a certain emotional response in the child. It feels the protecting and supporting power of the father in whose hands it experiences security. In the father the child discovers the great thou and hence the relation is an interpersonal one: an I -thou relation. It is in the father that the child makes the primal experience of encountering the other:

'The father is greater than I!' The father is always beyond the child inviting it to grow, challenging, demanding and thus consolidating the individuality of the child.

Now look at the same child lying on the lap of its mother and being fed by the milk of the mother's breast. This is an intense body contact because there is a flow of the vital sap from the mother's body into that of the child. The child feels a deep oneness with the mother. For the child the mother is the great I, and hence the relation is an intrapersonal one: I am in the mother and the mother is in me; I draw life from the mother and live through her. It is through the mother that the child makes the primal experience of being oneself and develops selfconfidence. The child meets the mother not as someone before it, but as the womb of its being and source of life. The mother is within the child and the child within the mother. The mother is power in the life and growth of the child.

This integral experience of the child in relation to its father and mother may help us to grasp the mystery of Jesus' relation with the Divine. Jesus experienced God as Father-and-Mother: as thou in an interpersonal mode and as the true I (Self) in an intrapersonal way. In the words, 'the Father is greater than I', 'the Father sent me', 'It is my father's will ..', 'I do what the Father has told me to do' an I-Thou relation with the Father is evident. (5:36; 6:39; 14:31; 14:28) When on the other hand Jesus says, 'I am in my Father and the Father is in me', 'I come from within the Father', 'I draw life from the Father' (14:10; 17:21; 16:28; 8:42; 6:57) an intrapersonal I-Self relation with the mother unfolds. In the latter frame Jesus experienced the Divine as the womb, the ground of being and source of life. It is through this intrapersonal experience of the mother dimension that his interpersonal relation with God reaches the transpersonal unity with the Divine: 'I and the Father are One' (10:30). Deep within himself Jesus experienced the Divine as the Mother, though this experience has been articulated through the symbol of the Father. Without paying attention to Jesus' experience of oneness with the Divine - and hence the mother dimension - we cannot really speak of him as the Son of God. Jesus is Son of God not in the sense of Israel's kings or like 'all who are guided by the Spirit' (Rom. 8:14), but in the sense of being of the same nature of the Father (*homoousios*). He is Son not by adoption or vocation but by nature in eternal preexistence. This inner trinitarian oneness can be adequately expressed only if the dimension of Jesus' experience of the Divine as Mother is taken seriously. The God in Jesus' consciousness is fatherly

Mother and motherly Father at the same time, person and power, Thou and I, before him and within him, 'greater than him' and at the same time 'one with him'.

Symbols of Motherliness

Deep within the experience of God as Father there is the awareness of the Divine as Mother. This is not just a question of shifting the gender in language but diving deeper into the consciousness of Jesus. For this some of the Johannine symbols would be of help. Symbol is the language of spiritual experience. The Gospel according to John offers several symbols that articulate the depth dimension of Jesus' God-consciousness:

(i) **The Tree.** Jesus spoke of himself as the vinestock (15:5). No vinestock or stem of a tree stands by itself; it is supported and enlivened by the roots hidden in the mother earth: 'I draw life from the Father', 'I am sent forth by the Father', 'I remain in his love' (6:57; 15:9). The root which is the source of life has made the stem also the source of life (5:26). Just as the stem experiences the life-giving root Jesus experiences the Father. The root hidden in the womb of the mother earth is an archetypal symbol of the motherliness of the Divine.

(ii) **The well.** Jesus described himself as a well that offers the waters of divine life. (4:14; 7:38) A well is the opening of the womb of the earth and the outpouring of the springs hidden in the mother earth. Jesus could offer 'streams of living water., the Spirit' (7, 37-38) because he had the consciousness that in and through him the divine springs have been opened: 'I come forth from the Father', 'The Father who is the source of life has made the Son the source of life' (8:14,42; 5:26). Jesus experienced therefore the Divine as the hidden springs within himself: the Father is the self-outpouring motherly spring, the Son is the well that opens the spring and the Spirit is the water of divine life. In this archetypal imagery too the hidden springs are the symbol of the motherliness of the Divine.

(iii) **The Word.** John's Gospel begins with the hymn of Logos. Jesus understood himself as the 'Word that is God' : Word *of* God and *with* God, Word *in* God and *out of* God. (1:1-5) Every word emerges out of the womb of silence. Jesus experienced himself as the articulation of the Word of the Father: 'What I speak comes not from within myself, but from within the Father' (12: 49). The Father is the true Self that spoke through the

Son. The Father is the eternal silence within the word that became flesh (5:37; 1:14). Out of the womb of the divine silence is the Word born. This too is an archetypal symbol of the motherliness of the Divine.

(iv) The Prologue of the Gospel ends with an impressive imagery: the Son is clinging on to the feeding breast of the Father (1:18). The Greek word *kolpos* has often been translated as bosom or heart. But it has also the meaning, the feeding breast of the mother. The Greek preposition *eis* connotes a movement towards something, a movement of adherence, a clinging on to someone. Hence the expression *eis ton kolpon* offers the image of a child clinging on to the feeding breast of its mother. 'No one has ever seen God except the only begotten Son who clings on to the feeding breast of the (divine motherly) Father'.

(v) With experience of the Divine as Mother Jesus understood himself as the unfolding of the divine motherly source: as the well (Son) that opens the spring (Father) and pours out the water (Spirit). 'The Father who is the source of life has made the Son the source of life' (5:26). Hence Jesus could ecstatically invite people to the divine well opened in him: 'come and drink from me' (7:38; 4:14). Who can say this except a mother to her child? Just as the milk from the mother's body becomes the vital sap in the child, the living water that one drinks from Christ becomes a spring welling up to eternal life' in the believer (4:14; 7:38). Jesus understood himself as the embodiment of the compassionate and lifegiving motherly love of God from the womb (*rechem*) of the Divine. Church Fathers like Origen, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Athanasius and Ambrose have reflected on this archetypal symbolism in speaking of the Divine as Trinity. The creed of the Council of Toledo (675) has an insightful phrase: *Filius natus vel genitus est de utero Patris* (the Son is born or generated from within the womb of the Father). In the Middle Ages there has been in the Church a trend of devotion to Jesus the Mother. A rediscovery of this mother-dimension of the Divine in theology and spirituality is an epochal need.

Towards an Integral Spirituality

A spirituality that evolves out of this integral experience of Jesus will have the following dimensions:

1. Personal Spirituality: (i) A sense of the Divine mystery permeates the entire spiritual life of the person. A contemplative awareness of this mystery awakens the mystic in the person. One experiences a deep oneness with the Divine and with all beings in the Divine. All her/his

doings - internal attitudes and external activities - evolve out of a sense of integral being, that is constantly being transformed by the Spirit, the motherly energy of God. (ii) Life in the Spirit means a progressive integration of the polarities of life: emotionality and rationality, heart and head, the right and the left halves of the brain, contemplation and action, yin and yang. Holiness is wholeness. (iii) Openness to the Spirit creates an openness to the manifold ways in which the Spirit unfolds itself in history. One acknowledges the diversity of religions and respects the spiritual experiences of others. There is then alertness to the liberative dynamics of religions and cultures. The spiritual person is a co-pilgrim with believers of other religions in pursuit of the 'God beyond God'.

2. Socio-ecological Spirituality. (i) The individual has the awareness of being an integral part of the totality: like branches of a vine held together by the divine vinestock, the motherly power of life and unity. The person not only encounters the other as thou, but grows as part of the other within the unfolding of the Self. A sense of personal identity emerges not so much in being different from others as in becoming one with others. Identity is in harmony. (ii) The experience of the Divine as compassionate Mother makes a person increasingly compassionate. One feels intensely the struggles and sufferings of others as part of the evolution of life in oneself. Compassion overcomes estrangement and creates intense communion. (iii) The holistic perspective of reality gives rise to a spirituality with eco-sensitivity. The earth is not an inert matter but the extension of one's body; human body is earth waking up to consciousness. Experience of the motherliness of the Divine helps one experience the earth as mother. A genuinely spiritual person feels a compassionate attitude towards all beings which live on the one earth and concern for the integral welfare of all. Promotion of social justice can be effective only in a concern for eco-harmony.

3. Spiritual Community. (i) A community that evolves out of the integral experience of Jesus - the Divine as Father-and-Mother-cannot onesidedly emphasise laws and structures, concepts and definition, norms and rituals, most of which are determined and controlled by men. It would rather promote creative freedom, plurality of charisms, personal spiritual search and tolerance towards other religions. The community of the disciples of Jesus will become more compassionate when they draw inspiration from Jesus' primal experience of being the embodiment of God's compassion. (ii) *Theological* reflection will be constantly nourished by *theosophical* search. Mental reflection in view of conceptual clarity cannot transform believers unless it draws life from mystical contempla-

tion. Consequently the language of theology will not be predominantly a conceptual language; rather it would develop an aesthetic language with myths and stories, poetry and music, art and sculpture, dance and folklore in order to articulate the experience of the Divine. (iii) In the community that evolves out of Jesus' experience of the Divine as Motherly Father 'there is no distinction between male and female' (Gal. 3:28). In it there can be no room for male domination either in the patterns of thought or in the structures of administration. It is when God is conceived exclusively in masculine symbols that male chauvinism determines religious life and thought. The experience of Jesus as well as the mystical symbols he used to describe his experience points clearly to the mother dimension of God experience. Consequently the community of believers in Jesus would promote the equality of men and women in all spheres of life within itself and in the civic society as well.

Sameeksha,
Kalady

Sebastian Painadath

THE EXCOMMUNICATION OF TISSA BALASURIYA: A WARNING TO ASIAN THEOLOGIAN?

Georg Evers examines the various factors which were operating behind the tragic excommunication of the Sri Lankan theologian Tissa Balasuriya. With a deep insight into the dynamics of Asian theologies he analyses this issue in the broader context of the evolution of contextualised theologies in Asia. His study unearths the hidden motives of the Roman Ecclesiastical offices 'to measure all non-European theologies with the yardstick of an orthodoxy, which is defined strictly according to European standards'. How can the theology of a monocultural continent be the norm for the creative theological endeavours of the multicultural Asia! This article is a timely contribution towards taking a Gospel-based stand on the motives of the forthcoming 'Asian' synod, which is paradoxically to take place in 'Rome'. Georg Evers works at the Institute of Missiology, Missio, Germany,

At first sight the excommunication of Fr. Tissa Balasuriya appears to be the individual case of a theologian who has exposed ideas regarding traditional theological doctrines, like original sin, the need of Jesus Christ and the Church for salvation, mariology and other topics, which were considered to be contrary to the Church's teaching. The controversy surrounding the publication of the book "Mary and Human Liberation" - actually it is not a genuine book publication, but a double issue of *Logos*, a journal edited at the Centre for Society and Religion in Colombo, of which Fr. Tissa Balasuriya has been the director for many years - did start only two years after its publication in 1990. For nearly two years it was an affair of the local Church in Sri Lanka. An ad-hoc commission of bishops and theologians presented Tissa Balasuriya with a list of errors which they alleged were contained in his book *Mary and Human Liberation* and which he was asked to correct. Several attempts by Tissa Balasuriya to point out the distortions, falsifications and insinuations contained in the paper of the commission, were not accepted. The affair became a public issue after Tissa Balasuriya published his version of the procedures against

him, and the Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka, on their part, warned the Catholic faithful in the Catholic weekly "Messenger" that Tissa Balasuriya's book contained serious errors and should not be read by the faithful. It is ironic that translations of the book "Mary and Human Liberation" were made into Sinhala only after the process against Tissa Balasuriya was started and in the wake of its accompanying publicity. Since the copies of the journal *Logos* had been sold out another edition was made and sold well not only in Sri Lanka but also abroad. The translations into Urdu in Pakistan and into Korean in Korea also are the result of the publicity the process against Tissa Balasuriya has originated. It is, therefore, correct to state that the very action, which was allegedly intended to protect the faithful against the errors contained in the book, had the opposite result of spreading its contents beyond the narrow circle of people who subscribe to the journal *Logos* in the first place. After that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith took the issue out of the hands of the local bishops. The detailed refutation of the accusations made against him by Tissa Balasuriya was not accepted by the congregation in Rome which only responded with a general verdict of "Not satisfactory"! Attempts by Tissa Balasuriya to have a canonical process according to the stipulations prescribed by Canon Law in heresy cases were not accepted. Instead, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith presented Tissa Balasuriya with a profession of faith which was specially drafted solely for him - an unprecedented event in the history of the congregation! - which he was asked to recite and sign in front of two witnesses. This profession of faith took up the controversial issues of the book regarding original sin, Christology and Mariology and contained also a clause regarding the impossibility of the Church to confer priestly ordination on women - again an unprecedented inclusion into the general confession of faith. Tissa Balasuriya was not ready to sign this special profession of faith, which the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith rather cynically called "a help", because it contained the corrections of the erroneous teachings Tissa Balasuriya allegedly had propagated. Tissa Balasuriya, on the contrary, defended himself claiming that the theological ideas he advanced are common among theologians, not only in the First, but also in the Third World. He could not understand why he has been singled out and asked to deny theological theses which other theologians propagate without incurring canonical sanctions. Tissa Balasuriya then recited the profession of faith of Pope Paul VI instead of the special profession prepared in Rome for him. He concluded this profession of faith by adding the

clause that he understood this profession "in the context of theological development and Church practice since Vatican II and the freedom and responsibility of Christians and theological searchers, under Canon Law". In the eyes of the Congregation, this addition rendered the declaration of faith defective, since it diminished the universal and permanent value of the definitions of the Magisterium. This controversy again has to do with the basic issue in the case of Tissa Balasuriya, namely the question whether the doctrinal formulations of the Christian faith have universal validity irrespective of the context in which they are proclaimed, or whether it is the task of theologians in a continuous effort to inculturate the essence of these formulations into different cultural and religious contexts to develop these formulations or to find new expressions more suitable to a given context. The answer of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith was to declare on January 4th, 1997 that Fr. Tissa Balasuriya had incurred the penalty, expressly approved by Pope John Paul II, of automatic excommunication or in the technical language of Canon Law: *latae sententiae* - for holding heretical positions incompatible with the faith of the Church.

Characteristics of the Theology of Tissa Balasuriya

In the whole controversy it is important to be aware of the fact that Tissa Balasuriya is in the first place a theologian who has been dealing with social questions, with the effects the present economic system of the global market has on countries of the Third World, with the problems of poverty and their causes and the sociological, economic and political problems connected with them. His life achievement is the *Centre for Society and Religion* in Colombo which he has helped to build up and which, since many years, has been dealing in special research and publications with the social, economic and political problems of Sri Lanka and Asia as a whole.¹ The many contributions he has made in the

-
1. Ulrich Dornberg calls Tissa Balasuriya with regard to the volume of his publications one of the leading theologians of Sri Lanka. He remarks that Tissa Balasuriya is fond of polemical formulations and often sweeping argumentations, and not much addicted to the niceties of classical theological debate. But on the other hand, he points out that the motivation for entering into theological debate, for Tissa Balasuriya is his concern for the social dimensions of liberation theology in the present Asian situation. Cf. U. Dornberg, "Searching Through the Crisis, Christians, Contextual Theology and Social Change in Sri Lanka", in: *Logos* 31 (1992) 3 & 4 p.1 47.

publication "Social Justice" of the Centre contained always criticism of the present world economic system combined with analyses of the negative impact this system has for countries of the Third World. From this vantage point Tissa Balasuriya has again and again taken the side of the poor and the victims, a task he considers to be the core of the Christian message of justice, peace and liberation. It is, therefore, correct to consider Tissa Balasuriya in the first place to be a specialist in the field of social justice and only in second place as a theologian. His interest has always been to analyse the present system of injustice and poverty from the point of view of being a member of a Catholic religious congregation which is working for a change of this situation of injustice. His method of doing theology has been the one developed by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) of which he had been a founding member.² In conformity with the basic method of all liberation theologians from the countries of the Third World this group starts theologising from a social analysis of a given situation, the results of which are reflected in the light of faith, and a course of action to remedy the situation is then developed as pastoral answer. Here lies the difference to the method of traditional social teaching in the social doctrine of the Church which starts on the contrary from general principles which are considered to be applicable everywhere and at any time. Tissa Balasuriya has been accused that he is knowledgeable more in the field of social sciences, in social analysis and the discussion on a just economic order, and that he should have stayed outside the field of dogmatic theology.³

Tissa Balasuriya has written his book *Mary and Human Liberation*⁴ precisely because he is objecting against the way in which mariology has been presented traditionally - as a pious issue, remote from the stark

-
2. A brief outline of his life as a Catholic theologian Tissa Balasuriya has given himself, while defending himself against the accusations made regarding his orthodoxy. Cf. Tissa Balasuriya, "The Threatened Excommunication," in: *Social Justice* 30 (1996) 12, no. 116, 12-19.
 3. This has been the line of reasoning of Bishop Malcolm Ranjith who has been the first to raise objections against the orthodoxy of "Mary and Human Liberation". Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, too, has been accusing Tissa Balasuriya to have been heavily influenced by Marxist ideas, and not so much by theological reasoning. Cf. the interview of Josef Ratzinger of January 24th, 1997 in Rome.
 4. Published originally as double issue of *Logos* 29 (1990) 1&2, 192 p.

realities of the life of people living in Asia, in a world where economic, social and political problems make life unbearable. The book has to be seen in a series of other publications such as *Jesus Christ and Human Liberation* and *Eucharist and human Liberation* which Tissa Balasuriya published earlier. In *Mary and Human Liberation* he criticises a form of Marian devotion which presents Mary as the devout servant who, in humility and obedience, submits to the will of God. This image of Mary, he claims, has been used in the past to justify submission to authority, including the colonial authorities as the predominant Christian virtue. With the image of Mary in the *Magnificat*, where the rich go empty-handed and the mighty are deposed of their thrones, this idea of the humble servant has not much in common. Together with many other liberation theologians, especially the feminist theologians in Africa, Asia and Latin America, Tissa Balasuriya is advocating a different image of Mary. It is a mariology *from below* which stresses the social significance of Mary as a woman who, in following her son come to preach the "good news to the poor", is combating injustice and social oppression.

As regards the teaching on original sin Tissa Balasuriya has raised basic criticism with regard to the Western conception of it which goes back to St. Augustine and only indirectly to the New Testament. Tissa Balasuriya, however, does not totally deny the theological insights contained in the traditional teaching on original sin, but questions its appropriateness in the Asian context. That is, he addresses the more basic problem whether the biblical data and the doctrinal formulations regarding original sin have to be expressed for all times in formulations and expressions, which have come down to us from a theological tradition, starting with Augustine and then taken up by the Council of Trent. Is it really impossible and not allowed to reflect again on the theological message, that all human beings are in a state of imperfection looking for redemption, illumination, freedom from the yoke of rebirth by using Asian expressions and images from the different major religions about the human condition in order to find out how they could be compatible with the doctrine of the redemption of humankind in Jesus Christ? Is it immediately evident that ideas about the basic goodness of human nature cannot be a corrective of overly pessimistic views on the human conditions found in some Christian traditions? On the other hand, the basic Buddhist insights about the human situation are in no way simply contrary to Christian notions about a general sinfulness of

humankind. The Buddhist notion of salvation and liberation of humankind from its general attachment in the thirst for goods (*trisna*) as is contained in the teaching of suffering (*dukkha*) are different from the Christian notion of sin and redemption in Jesus Christ. But it should be possible for Asian theologians to reflect again on these old doctrines in the context of their own religious and cultural tradition. In this exercise they should not be bound to adhere exclusively to a theological method and terminology coming from the West without any possibility to deviate from it or alter it.

Mistakes in Judiciary Procedure versus Mistakes in Religious Conduct

Tissa Balasuriya has pointed out many times that in the different stages which have led to his excommunication by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on January 4th, 1997 several mistakes in proper judiciary procedure according to the stipulations of Canon Law have occurred. There have been occasional encounters between him and the special ad-hoc commission as well as some talks with individual bishops. There has been also an exchange of letters between Tissa Balasuriya and the Congregation as well with the Curia of the Oblate Fathers in Rome. But the various requests by Tissa Balasuriya to have a proper process according to CIC 50 resp. CIC 221, 1-3 which would have enabled him to have access to the files of the legal procedure, to name his own counsel and to be able to present his own case were never granted. At no stage there has been an exchange of arguments between the parties, and the documentation Tissa Balasuriya presented in his defence was summarily turned down by the Congregation as unsatisfactory⁵. This is one side of the unhappy events which can only be summed up as a cumulation of mistakes in judiciary procedure.

There is, however, another side to the story which the bishops of Sri Lanka and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome present: the story of the religious Tissa Balasuriya who is accused of having been lacking in humility and in readiness to admit his theological mistakes. As a religious Tissa Balasuriya should have been listening to his religious superiors and the Roman authorities and should have complied with their demands to correct his defective theological ideas, to accept the ecclesial penalty for his deviations and to recite the profession of faith made up for him. It is correct and only fair to the various institutions and persons involved in the case to say that some of the public

statements by Tissa Balasuriya in interviews and writings have led to additional and unnecessary harsh altercations. From the point of view of a spirituality of ecclesial obedience and the virtue of *Sentire cum Ecclesia*, a case can be made out that it would have been proper for a religious to defend himself and his theological positions less stubbornly and that he should have made greater efforts to preserve the unity in the Church. It is possible to point out this human and religious weakness. A completely different argument, however, has to be made that these two sides of the conflict, the canonical judiciary aspects, on the one side, and the ascetic and spiritual aspects, on the other, have not been clearly distinguished. Was it really justified that the procedure ended in an excommunication - being the harshest punishment available in Canon Law? To declare certain theological positions as not compatible with the teaching of the Church is a matter which remains on the level of theological discussion and does not necessarily imply that a person defending such positions has to be considered morally wrong and sinful. To excommunicate a person, however, refers not only to theologically incorrect positions, but implies that the person thus condemned has committed in full knowledge and in free assent a fault of such grave nature that, as a consequence, he has severed himself *automatically* from the communion of the Church. This gives excommunication its special quality and harshness. The reactions to the excommunication of Tissa Balasuriya in Sri Lanka, in Asia and in many parts of the world express in the first place sadness, then deep disappointment, incomprehension, anger as well as protest. There have been reactions from outside the Church as well. Buddhists in Sri Lanka brought the excommunication directly in line with the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie, that is as an arbitrary act by a church organisation which is completely out of touch and tune with the general pace and development in present-day society. The question was raised about the different attitudes taken by the Church with regard to the faulty statements about Buddhism made by the pope in his book "Crossing the Threshold of Hope" and the faults in the book by Tissa Balasuriya⁵.

How can a Church, which claims to be a champion and advocate of human rights, fail to honour the right of one of its members to clear his

5. Cf. Tissa Balasuriya, "My Position is that..." in: *Social Justice* 31 (1997). no. 1, p.6

6. Cf. *The Tablet*, 15.03.97, p. 361s.

name of accusations in a fair trial? The response by Church authorities that there are special regulations within Canon Law which cannot be measured by arguments of secular judiciary procedure are no longer convincing. Common human rights should be valid within the Church as well if the Church wants to be credible in its defence of these rights in other fields. The lack of a separation of powers in the Church, where the legislative and the judiciary are in one hand, has the consequence that there cannot be any appeal made against a decision by the Supreme Pontiff. In the case of Tissa Balasuriya, this means that the appeal he made on January 15th, 1997 to the *Apostolic Signatura*, the highest ordinary judiciary court of the Curia, was not accepted in the end. In a first reply the *Signatura* seemed to accede to the case and even asked Tissa Balasuriya to name an advocate of his choice out of a list of Canon lawyers sent to him. Then Cardinal Sodano intervened and stated on February 5th, 1997 that the Holy Father personally, that is in canonical terms *in forma specifica*, had sanctioned the verdict against Tissa Balasuriya and that, consequently, an appeal to or a revision of the case by the *Signatura* was not possible.⁷

Asian Theologians under Roman Suspicion

There is the impression among theologians in Asia, which has been confirmed by the procedure of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith against Tissa Balasuriya, that there is a general tendency to control Asian theologians and to be critical of their attempts to develop contextual theologies by going back to the religious and cultural traditions of their countries. This became obvious last year when a group of Indian bishops was invited to go to Rome to undergo a short seminar, organised by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in which they were told about their responsibility to control and correct theological developments in India which were deviating from orthodoxy⁸. The accusation was made that the writings of Indian theologians in general lack clarity, without however naming the deviating theologians nor giving concrete references to the incriminated books or articles. Criticism was levelled against some christological statements by Indian theologians who fail to defend the unique role of Jesus Christ in salvation, and who associate Jesus

7. Cf. *The Tablet*, 8 March 1997, p.333s.

8. Cf. George Evers, Theologen unter romischem Verdacht, in: *Herder Korrespondenz* 51 (1997) 1,14-16.

Christ with extraordinary religious personalities from other religions such as Buddha or Krishna, who are said to be mediators of salvation, too. In the field of interreligious dialogue some Indian theologians are accused of renouncing completely the remaining obligation of the Church to engage in missionary activity in order to convert people and not only to enter into a dialogue with the members of other religions. Indian approaches to inculturation were criticised as well, because they are unduly stressing the positive aspects of the religious and cultural heritage in Indian traditions and thus are obscuring the uniqueness of the Christian message. In a talk to the presidents of the doctrinal commissions of the Latin American Bishops' Conferences in Guadalajara in Mexico in May 1996, Cardinal Josef Ratzinger spoke on the topic "The Situation of Faith and Theology Today". In this talk he criticised pluralist theology of religions which has originated in the countries of the West which, on the other side, has a surprising affinity and similarity with philosophical and religious intuitions in Asia⁹. The present situation is in the eyes of Cardinal Ratzinger characterised by the emergence of a form of theological relativism which he considers to be the danger of the present age. In the argumentation of the Cardinal, theological relativism is seen in close vicinity or even identity with theological pluralism. In an interview in January 1997 in Rome Cardinal Ratzinger defended the decision against Tissa Balasuriya and rejected the objection that this excommunication seemed to prove that Rome is no longer willing to accept any form of theological pluralism. Josef Ratzinger tried to show that his Congregation is not opposed to theological pluralism in general and admitted that Asian theologians need a limited form of theological pluralism to develop an Asian identity of the Catholic faith. The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith should not be accused of advocating only one form of theology as normative and binding. Josef Ratzinger then insisted that any form of theological relativism has to be fought, because it entails the danger that the unity of the Church is jeopardised¹⁰.

And here is the crux of the matter. The case of Tissa Balsuriya illustrates that the distinction between legitimate theological pluralism

9. Cf. L. 'Osservatore Romano, German edition of 22.11.1996, no. 47, 8-10; Ratzinger attacks relativism as the threat to faith, in: *the Tablet*, 25 January 1997, p. 119.

10. Why Fr. Balasuriya was excommunicated, in: *The Tablet* 1 February 1997, p. 152.

and defective theological relativism is a rather precarious one. In the condemnation of Tissa Balasuriya Ratzinger's Congregation is arguing that Tissa Balasuriya has deviated from the traditional methodology and the traditional formulations of the Magisterium, accusing him of relativism whereas he himself is claiming his right as an Asian theologian to make use of Asian categories and methodology to develop an Asian theology as an expression of legitimate theological pluralism within the Church.

In India theologians such as Kurien Kunnumparam and Jacob Parappally, both professors of theology in Pune, have pointed out that the development of contextual theologies becomes de facto impossible if the Magisterium insists on classical dogmatic formulations of the past which are alien to most Asian religious and cultural ways of thinking. In Asia most societies are characterised by their multireligious and multicultural forms of living together. The Christian Churches in Asia are small minorities which can only give witness to the message of Jesus Christ in a meaningful way when they respect the common Asian heritage in their theological work and theological formulations - a situation which the Vatican obviously fails to understand. They admit that it is possible and necessary to examine in how far Tissa Balasuriya may have deviated from the doctrine of the Church in his theological reflections and writings. But such an evaluation should be done in Asia by Asian bishops; and theologians who, from their experience of living in the cultural and religious context, are in a better position to make a judgement than Roman Congregations. The harsh and disciplinary action by Roman authorities, on the other hand, has had only a demoralising effect and will endanger further possible and necessary developments of Catholic theology in Asia. Similar statements have been made by theologians from Vidyajyoti. The professors Samuel Rayan, T.K. John and S. Arokiasamy criticise that there has never been a formal canonical process and the sanction imposed has been severely harsh. They, too, see a connection with the general attitude of suspicion on the part of the Roman authorities with regard to developments in Asian theology in the context of the preparation of the Special Asian Bishops' Synod to be held

11. Cf. "India: Oblate's Excommunication a Setback for Church Growth, Theologians Say", in; *UCA -News*, Dispatch no. 908/A, January 27-29, 1997, p.9.

in Rome in 1998¹¹. In Sri Lanka, Fr. Oswald Firth IMI, the successor of Tissa Balasuriya in the office of the director of the Centre for Society and Religion, has criticised Cardinal Ratzinger because, obviously, he has equated theological pluralism with theological relativism. From his acquaintance with the person and work of Tissa Balasuriya for many years Fr. Firth defends his fellow Oblate who, in his eyes, is definitely no relativist and surely no perfidious heretic¹². In contrast to the central leadership of the Oblates in Rome the home province has come out in defence of Tissa Balasuriya in a public statement, signed by the provincial Fr. John Camillus Fernando and the head of the theological commission of the Oblates, Fr. Anselm Silva, declaring that they consider Tissa Balasuriya as their confrere and religious. They continue that in more than 50 years of belonging to the Oblates Tissa Balasuriya has tried to implement the insights of Vatican II and the missionary priorities of the Oblates in his apostolate which had found the approval by his superiors and till recently by the bishops of Sri Lanka as well¹³.

In Sri Lanka Manel Abhayaratna, the editor of the archdiocesan English Catholic Weekly *Messenger*, has published an apology of the bishops' position under the title "The Other Side"¹⁴. The 50 pages strong pamphlet produces in an annex the official documents of the Roman authorities, but mainly makes the attempt to undermine the personal, professional and religious integrity of Tissa Balasuriya. A decisive point in the argumentation is that Tissa Balasuriya has offended against Canons 823 and 827 of the CIC, because he published his book *Mary and Human Liberation* without the imprimatur of the Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka. The contradiction in this line of argumentation becomes apparent when we take into account that *Mary and Human Liberation* was not a book publication in the technical sense, but constituted a double issue of the journal *Logos* which appeared in 1990 for the 29th time, and which never had any Imprimatur, as all journals published by the Centre for Society and Religion, something which never had incurred any protest by the bishops' conference. The way of argumentation in "The Other

12. Oswald Firth in an interview with the German Katholische Nachrichtenagentur, 11. Marz 1997, Nr.48.

13. Cf. "Sri Lanka Oblates Urge CDF to Repeal Excommunication of Theologian Confrere", in: *UCA-News*, January 29, 1997, SR 6810/908.

14. Manel Abhayaratana, *Mary and Human Liberation, The Other Side*, Colombo 1997.

Side" is to take single sentences of the text by Tissa Balasuriya out of their context and confront them with statements by the Councils, the Catechism of the Catholic Church and other statements of the Magisterium, in order to point out the deficiencies in Tissa Balasuriya's theological reasoning. It is this kind of "collage technique" which other theologians such as Aloysius Pieris SJ, have criticised on other occasions as a way of proceeding by Roman authorities¹⁵. In a collage certain text passages are taken out of context and brought into a completely different context where they acquire often directly opposite meaning. In such a way statements are fabricated which make the author say things he never intended to say and which he would never underwrite, or to give a sharpness to passages which the author never intended. Not only in Sri Lanka, but also from the part of the Vatican attempts have been made to counter the many negative press reactions regarding the excommunication of Tissa Balasuriya with their own explications and justification. Cardinal Ratzinger himself defended the action of his congregation against Tissa Balasuriya. The excommunication became necessary, the Cardinal alleged, not because Tissa Balasuriya was defending women's ordination but because he deviated from essential points of Christian doctrine. Josef Ratzinger added then a further argument by claiming that the theological positions of Tissa Balasuriya were more influenced by Marxist thinking than by his being an Asian theologian developing an Asian theology. This kind of argumentation, used before in the case of Latin American liberation theologians, was thus introduced for the first time in the discussion. The Papal Nuncios in the Indian sub-continent - and elsewhere? - received from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith a full documentation, including the text of the excommunication, to forward them to the local bishops' conferences, the local doctrinal commissions and the local theological community. This was done e.g. in Pakistan, where not only the book *Mary and Human Liberation* had been published in Urdu, but where the Conference of Major Superiors had made a public statement in favour of Tissa Balasuriya.

Tissa Balasuriya and Asian Contextual Theology

The discussion surrounding the "case" of Tissa Balasuriya has to be seen in the context of attempts by other Asian theologians to develop a contextual theology which takes up the Asian cultural and religious

15. Cf. A. Pieris, "A Christology in Asia", in: *Voices from the Third World*, 11 (1988) 2, 155-172.

heritage and to consider it together with the Christian message as part of their own identity. For Asian Christians the starting point for entering into interreligious dialogue is more existential than intellectual. This is due to the fact, of what Asian Christians have called their double allegiance, to the Gospel and Christian doctrines on the one hand, and to their own cultural and religious Asian heritage on the other. Asian Christians take seriously the presence and faith claims of their own cultural heritage, within which they are living, largely due to an existential quest for a coherent self and cultural identity. Asian theologians are aware that, in their attempts to inculturate Christianity, they are forced to come up with new forms of doing theology, that is with a theological methodology suited to Asian forms of thinking and expressing ideas. They are aware that in the Western worldview and anthropology, orthodoxy is ranking very highly when it comes to philosophical and religious problems. Dogmatic statements on religious matters are considered in the West to express the reality in question, and thus to be the only true expression of a given theological truth, with the exclusion of all other forms which might be true as well. The insistence on the validity of the principle of non-contradiction - *non datur tertium!* - is an essential part of this understanding of the possibility to express religious truth in a binding form in certain dogmatic statements and formulations. The history of the many religiously motivated wars in Europe gives witness to this fixation on orthodoxy which ironically often goes together with astonishing failures in the field of orthopraxis. The defence of the truth is seen as an absolute value which has to be defended at all costs. The many heresy trials and the harsh punishments meted out against deviators from the truth are ample proof of this way of thinking. There had been a certain expectation that after the break-through in theology and the opening of the Catholic Church to become truly a world church, which is the hall-mark of Vatican II, this kind of thinking had definitely been overcome. Besides the excommunication of Tissa Balasuriya, which in a sense marks a highlight in a negative development to return to former practices, there have been other incidents of theologians who were accused of having committed doctrinal errors, such as the cases of Hans Kung, Charles Curran, Leonardo Boff, and Ivone Gebara, where there were ecclesial censures but no excommunications. It is difficult to understand why the Roman authorities felt obliged to use this kind of punishment against an Asian theologian who

might have lacked theological precision and made rather sweeping statements on doctrinal matter, but who expressed basically ideas common among theologians in general and Asian theologians in particular. The reactions by Asian theologians show that the action against Tissa Balasuriya is understood to be more than the punishment of only an individual theologian, but that it has to be seen as a warning to Asian theologians in general. In the context of the up-coming Asian Synod in Rome in 1998 Aloysius Pieris SJ¹⁶ fears that Rome will use the occasion to counter, what it considers, to be an over-inculturation, propagated by Asian theologians and enforce again the traditional forms of Christology and Mariology. Pieris points out the differences in languages - on the one hand the theology of Rome which tries to reduce the unfathomable mystery of salvation into neat error-free formulae and on the other hand the oblique language of Asian theologians who avoid definitions and prefer similes, stories and images, that is a language and forms of expression which are not precise in a logical sense. Pieris warns against a "theological imperialism" which gives certain doctrinal formulations of the Christian message an absolute validity and which allows for new formulations, e.g. in recurrence to Asian thought and language models, only in so far, that their congruence with the old formulations remains obvious. To conform with this rule would imply, however, that practically only translations of the old formulas into Asian languages would be possible, because truly any given Asian alternative formulations could never achieve the conciseness and pregnancy of the Western formulations. In this form of theology Pieris sees a basic temptation within the Church that, in the justified concern to preserve the unity within the Church, there is an insistence on conceptual uniformity in all important matters of faith which does no longer respect the basic theological insight, that all dogmatic formulations are only insufficient attempts to express the mystery of God and Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 3:18). No paradigm can, therefore, claim to be the only valid one. A church, which as world church has found a home in many cultures, has to respect several paradigms as equally valid. In the Church, therefore, we need an intra-church form of dialogue which guarantees, that the different paradigms are communicating with one another. We need competent interpreters which are

16. Cf. *The New Leader*, No. 3, 1-15 February 1997, p. 9

familiar with more than one paradigm and who as mediators within the world church are actively promoting unity in diversity within the ecclesial communities, a task, which can be seen analogous to the work of foreign missionaries in the various local churches today. There remains, however, a lasting tension between preservation of unity and the acceptance of a theological pluralism, which is the necessary consequence of the process of inculturation of Christianity within different cultural, religious and anthropological contexts. Any attempt to bring these different paradigms into a new synthesis can only result in destroying any genuine pluralism. Inculturation is part of the incarnational principle operating in Christianity which takes seriously that Christ emptied himself and has made all efforts to be like us. A church and a theology which claims allegiance to him, cannot, therefore, confine this message to certain historically developed concepts which are derived from a certain philosophical tradition and postulate that these concepts are timelessly valid in all cultures and languages¹⁷.

Sebastian Painadath SJ¹⁸ raises the question whether the implications of the case of Tissa Balasuriya are that only a theology developed in the monocultural ambience of Europe, which never experienced religious pluralism, can be considered to be normative for the rest of the world. In Asia the Christian Churches and theologians live in a world with many religions and cultures, and they are faced with the task to present their Christian faith in such a way that it becomes intelligible to their fellow Asians in a dialogical fashion. Francis D'Sa SJ has pointed out the preference of Western theology to engage in a "dialectical dialogue" which is aimed, in the first place, to prove the truth of one's own faith to the other. In Asia, however, the call of the day is to come to a "dialogical dialogue" in the context of religious pluralism in which we give witness of our religious experience rather than trying to prove the tenets of our faith¹⁹. There are other fundamental rules of thinking and speaking to be observed when engaging in an interreligious dialogue, but which should be observed also when dealing with different contexts in one's own

17. Cf. A. Pieris, "Human Rights Language and Liberation Theology," in *Vidyajyoti* 52 (1988), 522-536.

18. Cf. *Christ in der Gegenwart* 49 (1997) no. 9, 2 March 1997, p. 71.

19. Francis D'Sa, *Gott der Dreieine und der All-Ganze*, Dusseldorf 1987, p. 127.

Christian tradition. In the context of a world church, it becomes necessary to be able to discern different strands in the tradition and to respect, that Christians living in different contexts come to different expressions of their faith. Only in doing so will it be possible to avoid a sterile uniformity in the Church. The problem with the exercise of the teaching office in the Church today is, that in dealing with non-European forms of theology, be it Latin American liberation theologies, African models of inculturation or Asian forms of contextual theologies, the Magisterium has recurrence only to the classical forms of European theology to criticise and condemn the emerging new forms of theological expressions as not being in conformity with the Church's teaching. It is, therefore, not of much help, when the Magisterium officially states, that there should be room for a plurality of theological expressions within the Church, when all non-European theologies are measured with the yardstick of an orthodoxy, which is defined strictly according to European standards. Asian bishops and theologians have pointed out that, in reflection on a theology of religion and interreligious dialogue, attention should be paid to non-verbal forms of communication. Conceptual communication, they stressed, has in-built limitations when trying to mediate religious experiences. In Western theology there is an undue stress on mental clarity and verbal formulations in abstract concepts which are incapable of expressing the richness of the religious and theological experience of the divine and unfathomable mystery of God. The greater the distance between these concepts and the original experience of the fascination with the *mysterium tremendum* of the divine reality becomes, which defies human concepts, the more the temptation grows to succumb to the error that the reality of the divine mystery could be "caught" and "understood" in theological concepts. In Asia the insight is widely acknowledged that there are clear limits to the understanding of the divine mystery and that precisely the deepest religious experiences, such as illumination (*satori* etc.) are beyond verbal formulations. Among persons who share the same depth in religious experiences there exists a form of non-verbal communication which can be found in silent meditation, in the common exercise of certain religious rites and forms of prayer, which make possible a communication of high intensity and depth that does not rely on conceptual language or verification. In a document of the FABC on interreligious dialogue this was expressed as follows: *There is a second level to language, a level yet*

deeper and more precious. Proper to this level is the registering of feelings in their entirety, a flowing with the flow of the heart. Feeling at home with the inner world of the other, seeing and relishing as the other feels and relishes, resonating with the awe and profound reverence with which the other experiences the sense of the divine - all this is part of preparedness for dialogue²⁰.

The "Loud" Silence of European and North American Theologians

It is somewhat striking that the response and the discussion to the "case of Tissa Balasuriya" have been rather weak within the theological circles in Europe and North America. This phenomenon can be called a "loud" silence because it makes obvious that the personal acquaintance with the work and ideas of the leading theologians of the Third World is not yet as widespread, as one might have expected. There is a clear difference to be noted in that the reception of Latin American liberation theologies has been much greater than the acceptance of new theological ideas coming from Africa or Asia. This holds true, surprisingly, also for the theological discussion in the field of interreligious dialogue and theology of religions - an area which has to be considered to be the original field of Asian theological contributions where the main discussion still seems to centre on European or North American contributions²¹. Some years ago John Baptist Metz has been talking of the beginning of a new phase within the history of the Church. He spoke of the new paradigm which he called the "emergence of a culturally polycentric world church"²². With this description Metz was following up on an idea,

20. *For All the Peoples of Asia*, FABC Document 1970-1991, New York - Manila 1992, p. 332.

21. Cf. the series of Orbis "Faith meets faith" which is edited by P. Knitter and which presents mainly theologians from the USA or Europe. Asian theologians are represented in that they are living or teaching in the USA such as e.g. R. Panikkar, K. Koyamma, and C.S. Song. Cf. also L. Swidler (ed.): *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, New York 1987; J. Hick/P. Knitter (eds.) *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness, Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, New York 1987 et. al.

22. J.B. Metz, *Im Aufbruch zu einer kulturell polyzentrischen Weltkirche*, in: F.X. Kaufmann-J.B. Metz; *Zukunftsfähigkeit, Suchbewegungen im Christentum*, Freiburg 1987, 93-165.

originally proposed by Karl Rahner who had spoken of the emergence of a truly world church as the historically lasting contribution to church history by Vatican II.²³ These theological insights into the necessity of an ecclesial and theological pluralism have been pushed into the background due to the growing centralist tendencies in the Church. In one of his last contributions before his death Karl Rahner has spoken of the danger of a new rites controversy, if the challenges of the new theological endeavours in the churches of Asia, Africa and Latin America were not given room to develop²⁴. The "case of Tissa Balasuriya" is an indication that these restrictive tendencies within the Church and the Roman Curia have been growing. Compared with reactions to other disciplinary actions by Rome the echo with regard to the case of Tissa Balasuriya has been rather reduced. The two donor agencies *Missio* and *Miseror*²⁵ of Germany as well as the *Institute of Missiology Missio*²⁶ have made statements in which they deplore the lack of communication and readiness for dialogue within the Church. As we have pointed out there has been more support and discussion within the circle of Asian theologians, already during the process and after the proclamation of excommunication. The IV Plenary Assembly of EATWOT in Manila in December 1996 has passed a declaration which calls for a revision of the excommunication and a proper canonical process. In a separate declaration the Women's Commission of EATWOT expressed its sisterly solidarity and sympathy with Tissa Balasuriya especially for his stance with regard to women's priestly ordination.

Conclusion

When the smoke has settled and one looks back at the whole issue of the excommunication there is one question which has to be asked: Cui bono? Who has profited from it? Is there anyone in the Bishops' Conference in Sri Lanka or in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the

23. K. Rahner, "Theologische Grundinterpretation des II. Vatikanischen Konzils", in: *Schriften zur Theologie*, Vol. XIV, Einsiedeln 1980, 287-302.

24. K. Rahner, "Ritenstreit - Neue Aufgaben für die Kirche", in: *Schriften zur Theologie*, Vol. XVI, Einsiedeln 1984, 178-184.

25. Hilfswerke kritisieren Exkommunikation von Tissa Balasuriya, Katholische Nachrichtenagentur, 11. Januar 1997, S.7

26. Statement of the Institute of Missiology Missio, in: *Vidyajyoti* 61 (1997) 2, 120-122.

Faith in Rome who can justly claim that something positive was achieved? The overall result is hurt as regards the person of Fr. Tissa Balasuriya, sadness among many faithful about the image of a Church incapable of handling a conflict in a human, not to say "Christian", manner, insecurity among theologians and discouragement to continue with the difficult task of expressing the Christian faith in conformity with Asian cultural and religious heritage and traditions. Sri Lanka is experiencing its worst crisis after achieving political independence and is torn in a strife and conflict which costs thousands of lives and causes untold material and immaterial damage. Does the Church really not have other problems to turn to and to involve herself than to engage in a quarrel about doctrinal matters which in itself are important for the unity of faith, but which were in no way a public issue before the Bishops made them into one?

Institute of Missiology Missio
Goethestrasse - 43
D-52064 Aachen, Germany

Georg Evers

Bulletin

Statement of the First European Women's Synod

(Gmunden, Austria, 21-28 July 1996)

Preamble

We, more than thousand women from Europe and around the world, gathered in Gmunden, Austria, July 21-28, 1996, for the 1st European Women's Synod. Our common understanding, undergirding all our work was based on the following convictions:

1) Women's rights are fundamental Human Rights

We demand their implementation in Europe as well as on the global level.

We reject as illegal every form of violence against women, physical, structural and cultural.

We commit ourselves to call by name, publicize and combat violent actions.

We demand the acceptance of diverse lifestyles and demand dignity and respect for everybody.

2) The earth is the foundation of all life.

As women we exert influence on an economic order for Europe which respects the integrity of the earth, all human communities and the survival of future generations.

We commit ourselves to the development of sustainable lifestyles and societies.

3) Justice is the root of harmonious relationships.

As women of Europe we demand just economic conditions and just social structures globally. This means a just sharing of work and establishment of living conditions in which all can live well.

We condemn racism.

We condemn war and nuclear weapons.

We condemn the production and export of all weapons.

In our different liturgies we celebrated the gift of life and the divine mystery of relatedness and community. Therefore, we offer the following statements on politics, spirituality and personal development.

Politics

1. A fundamental critique of the political organisation of state and faith communities is necessary.

A new progress for decisions in states, institutions and faith communities is necessary.

We urge the promotion of Human Rights for women and men.

We urge the adoption and implementation of international Human Rights instruments to end all forms of discrimination.

We urge the separation of state and religion.

We demand that measures be taken to maintain the integrity of creation.

We condemn fanaticism in every religion.

2. To overcome poverty is to overcome structural violence. Sharing income, work and wealth is solidarity.

We share the struggles of blacks, migrants, immigrants, Sinti/Roma people and women and men from ethnic minorities for equal cultural, economic and social conditions.

We share the struggles of lesbian and bi-sexual women against discrimination and criminalization in society and faith communities.

We urge that sexual violence in armed conflict be recognized as grounds for seeking asylum.

We urge that current or systematic sexual violence against women and children or rape perpetrated by state, military or para-military groups, or imminent genital mutilation of girls and women be recognized as a reason for granting asylum.

We condemn sexual violence and rape as a means of warfare.

We urge the provision of therapeutic care for women who have suffered violence in armed conflicts and civil life.

We urge that women's initiatives for non-violent transformation are given all necessary support.

We commit ourselves to working towards these goals.

Economics

- 1) We women are in the centre of the economy; in fact we are doing $\frac{2}{3}$ of all work. We call for recognition of all the work we do, paid and unpaid in satellite accounts and official statistics. We demand women's participation in decision-making processes in secular and religious institutions.

We commit ourselves to establishing networks of women to:

- a) study and develop a new economic model aimed at the well-being and survival of all: women, children, and creation itself
- b) promote solidarity networks among women from North, South, East, and West.

- 1) We ask for women's and men's resistance to Neoliberalism and other policies and their negative effects: evident for example in social benefit cut-backs, in structural adjustment programmes, the trafficking of women, sex tourism, migration and the exploitation of the earth. Neoliberalism, such as the policies of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Union, puts markets and money first. We consider that human beings, in all their richness and diversity, must come first.

Therefore we demand alternative models of creative ways of organizing work and leisure time and equal sharing of work. We demand that our national governments acknowledge alternative life styles, and where necessary make appropriate changes. The personal is political. Small steps in everyday life are crucial, such as the power we exercise in our choices as consumers.

Spirituality

1. Women have spiritual and religious authority in all spheres of life. We therefore demand access to all church ministries, including the ordained ministry of women in the Roman Catholic Church.

When we share holy communion around our kitchen tables, we celebrate the sacrament of everyday life.

We acknowledge the rich and creative theological, educational, pastoral and liturgical work done by women.

2. We are inspired by creation spirituality which draws on the traditions of the past as well as on the contemporary liturgical work done by women. We affirm the spirituality of women's experiences as a new mysticism and prophecy born in the solidarity and struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

We affirm the spirituality of resistance and dialogue, building upon women's experiences and the non-violent traditions in our different religious communities.

3. We affirm the spirituality of resistance against the present worldwide neo-liberal model of market economy and its violation of women and their cultural, ethnical and national communities.

We respect the creative imagination of women in developing alternative lifestyles and survival models, e.g. among indigenous women, and impoverished women in Europe and other parts of the world.

We condemn the cultural violation of women and minorities in Eastern Europe.

Personal Development

The Synod is committed to the empowerment of women to leadership in church and society, through self-awareness and mutual acceptance; a leadership based on the power of wisdom, expertise, courage, solidarity and compassion.

We affirm power in relations and the charism to empower others.

We therefore give priority to:

- ★ affirming the right of every woman to have power over her own body
- ★ the fact that we value life and different life styles
- ★ opposing the sexual abuse of women in their homes, workplaces and churches
- ★ pressing for the ordination of women in all churches, leading to their being given an equal status with men in all church ministries
- ★ we recognise the work of Non-Governmental Organisations for justice, development and peace
- ★ showing solidarity with black women in their struggle to liberate themselves from the double burden of racism and sexism
- ★ lobbying for the abolition of laws which discriminate against lesbians

- ★ opposing, in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster, the use of nuclear energy, and nuclear armaments, and to urging proper provision for the victims of such disasters
- ★ opposing the systematic exclusion of women from positions of authority in church and society

We support the achievement of the Beijing Platform for Action, already signed by 189 governments; we strive to be a constant voice reminding our governments to ensure that they adopt and implement the decisions of that Platform.

2. Governments and religious institutions are urged to ensure proper legislation which safeguards the rights and dignity of women everywhere, in accordance with the United Nations Charter in Human Rights, with particular reference to: lesbians, bi-sexuals, women subjected to violence - particularly in their homes, sexual harassment in pastoral relationships and women forced into prostitution and poverty.

We urge more women to play active roles in political and religious leaderships, and we are committed to the removal of unjust structures.

1. The editorial board does not necessarily endorse the individual views of contributors.
2. Articles for publication should be sent to the respective section editors.
3. Books for reviews (two copies each), exchanges, queries should be addressed to the general editor.
4. Subscriptions are payable in advance.
5. Subscription starts with January / February issues.
6. Copies are sent by sea mail unless otherwise required. Air surcharges will be extra.
7. Please address your subscriptions to:

Jeevadhara

Kottayam – 686 041

Do not send it to anybody's name.

Those who send subscriptions by cheque are requested to add also Bank Commission (Rs. 10 – 15)

SUBSCRIPTION RATE

Indian	Rs. 48/- (Malayalam)	
	Rs. 60/- (English)	
Foreign	(Sea mail)	(Air mail)
	\$ 20	\$ 26 (Americas)
	\$ 24	\$ 30(Canada)
	DM 30	DM 40 (Europe)
	£ 12	£ 16(England & Ireland)

Printed at Theocentre Press, Kottayam – 686 041
and Published at Jeevadhara Office, Kottayam – 41

by J. Constantine Manalel

JEEVADHARA

PRESENTS

a Mature Vision of Religion
a Liberation - based Social Perspective
and a Spirituality
relevant to concrete life - situations

IT IS

an incessant search
for Truth at all costs
and ever broadens
one's horizons of thought